PATTERNS OF POWER · THE SASANIAN EMPIRE

The Sasanian Empire

The Complete Study · 224 — 531 — 651

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with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

held as tested, not revealed

Held as tested, not revealed.

A case study in the Patterns of Power series.
Primary sources quoted exactly; modern scholarship paraphrased and credited.
Contested figures given as ranges. Nothing reconstructed from memory.

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Preface and Outline

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The collaboration

This is a case study in the Patterns of Power series, applying the series' framework to the Sasanian empire, from the defeat of the last Arsacid king in the spring of 224 to the death of Yazdegerd III at Merv in 651. The framework is a lens for reading how any order of power is founded, dressed and held: the floor of force beneath every order, the robe of doctrine laid over the floor to make the force cheap, the settlement that divides the spoils among the armed, the formation that installs a picture of the world in each new generation before it can be examined, the cost column in which each subject prices compliance, the seam where trusted information is held, the default by which an elite coordinates without instruction, and — running through all of it — position logic, the proposition that rulers in like positions converge on like solutions because a position poses a problem with only a few good answers.

The study was built the way the series is built, one module at a time. The author brought the framework, the direction and the judgement of the whole, and held the collaboration to its disciplines; Claude, Anthropic's model, did the research — verifying every load-bearing quotation, date and figure by web search against a source reproducing the primary text before any module was written — and produced the drafts, each presented and confirmed before the next was begun. The framework's concepts are the series'; the Sasanian application, and the refinements it yielded, are the work of the collaboration.

It was run as a controlled comparison. The preceding study in this collection took the Achaemenid empire, which occupied the same ground, drew on the same populations, faced the same rivers and passes, and was founded by men from the same province speaking a related language. Two orders, one landscape, seven centuries apart. Whatever they did alike, they did because the position permitted only so many answers; whatever they did differently, they chose. The comparison produced a result, and it is stated in the twelfth module.

The standing problem

Every study in this series has a source problem. This one has three, and they compound.

The first is that there is no neutral witness. Everything favourable ever written about this dynasty was written by the dynasty, by the priesthood it endowed and made rich, or by Muslim historians working from a lost court chronicle it had commissioned. Everything unfavourable was written by Romans working inside a literary tradition about Persian despotism, luxury and cruelty that runs unbroken from Herodotus to Procopius. The Armenian and Syriac material is the testimony of communities the empire persecuted, in genres — martyr-act, ecclesiastical history — designed to edify. There is no document in this case produced by somebody with nothing at stake, and the study accordingly asks of every source not whether it is true but who produced it, what he was scored on, and what he would have been punished for writing instead.

The second problem is that most of the Iranian religious literature is three to six centuries later than the period it describes. The Dēnkard, the Bundahišn and the *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag* are ninth- and tenth-century compilations, made under Islamic rule, by a shrinking community with excellent reasons for describing a golden age destroyed by a foreign conqueror. The most dangerous single error available in this subject is to quote a ninth-century text as third-century evidence, and the study states the compilation date at every point of use rather than once at the front.

The third is the one that shapes what this study could and could not do, and it should be stated at the outset rather than discovered in a source note. **The three most important bodies of evidence for the Sasanian empire are the three this study could not quote.** The royal and priestly inscriptions — Shapur's at the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt, Kirdir's four, Narseh's at Paikuli, the trilingual labels on the reliefs — exist only in modern editions that are in copyright, and are paraphrased throughout. The one surviving Sasanian law book, the *Hazār Dādestān*, exists in a 1937 English translation that the specialist who superseded it judged to fall short of scholarly standards and whose copyright position is unresolved, and in modern editions that are in copyright; it too is paraphrased. And the Babylonian Talmud, which is the only sustained internal record left by a subject population of any order in this collection, exists in one public-domain English version that is abridged, non-standard and did not carry the passages the study needed. A reader assessing what follows should know that its evidentiary spine is three bodies of material it had to describe rather than reproduce.

Against that, the compensating wealth was larger than expected. Sanjana's 1896 translation of the *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān* — the dynasty's own founding legend — is public domain and complete. Darmesteter's 1893 volume carries the Letter

of Tansar, the Dēnkard collection passages and Agathias in French. Chabot's 1902 *Synodicon Orientale* carries the acts of the church council of 410 that the Sasanian king himself convened. Wright's 1882 Joshua the Stylite, Yonge's 1862 Ammianus, Dewing's Procopius and Cary's Dio are all out of copyright. Between them they let the study quote the founding legend, the settlement's own argument, a Persian king negotiating with Roman ambassadors, and a subject church recording its own persecution at the king's invitation.

The disciplines

Five rules govern every module.

Quotation. Public-domain primary sources are quoted exactly, at the length the argument needs, because in an order held together by legal fictions the precise wording is the evidence and not its decoration. The corpus quoted here is the *Kārnāmag* in Sanjana (1896); Tacitus in Church and Brodribb; Ammianus Marcellinus in Yonge (1862); Cassius Dio in Cary and Procopius in Dewing, both Loeb and both public domain; the Chronicle attributed to Joshua the Stylite in Wright (1882); the Letter of Tansar, the Dēnkard and Agathias in Darmesteter's French (1893); the *Šāyest lā-Šāyest* and the *Sad Dar* in E. W. West's *Sacred Books of the East*; and the acts of the Synod of Mar Isaac in Chabot's French (1902).

No fabrication. No quotation, date, attribution or figure is invented or reconstructed from memory. What cannot be verified against a source reproducing the primary text is dropped or flagged, never guessed. Contested figures are given as ranges, and this study has many: the battle that founded the empire is dated by one Encyclopaedia Iranica article to 28 April 224 and by another to 28 May; the dead with Shemʿon bar Ṣabbaʿe are given as about a hundred, as 1,150, and by Sozomen as sixteen thousand; and the number of rulers between 628 and 632 is given as fourteen in four years and as thirteen over fourteen.

Gravity without partisanship. Suffering is held with gravity and the study refuses both flattery and demonisation. Legibility is not pardon: to explain an order's logic, even to credit its competence, is never to excuse it. In this case the discipline cuts in both directions, because the Sasanian order has a reputation for oriental despotism that the record does not support and a reputation for tolerance that the record supports only in a heavily qualified sense.

Contribution. Every module returns a refinement to the framework in its closing section rather than merely applying the framework to the case, and the findings compound across the modules rather than being announced fresh each time. One error

was made and corrected in the course of the work, on the face of the study rather than quietly, and the correction stands in Module 5 and again in Module 12.

Weakest evidence on the face of the module. Each part closes with a note separating exact primary quotation from paraphrased scholarship and naming its own weak links, including where they would embarrass the argument.

Three particular cautions were held throughout. Parvaneh Pourshariati's reading of the Sasanian order as a Sasanian–Parthian confederacy underlies the framing of the eighth and tenth modules and is contested; it has been used through its concrete institutional evidence — offices, seals, marriages, revolts — rather than adopted wholesale, and a reader who rejects it should be able to see exactly where the study would change. The scholarly dispute over whether the Sasanians remembered the Achaemenids at all is reported rather than resolved, with the strongest case for the other side stated at its own strength. And the later Iranian idealisation of Khosrow I as Anushirvan the Just, which shaped a thousand years of Islamic political thought, is treated as a fact about the tradition rather than about the man.

What the Sasanian Empire added to the framework

The case confirmed a great deal the framework had banked and returned findings of its own. The largest of them is stated last, because it is the one the whole study was built to reach.

That a founding narrative conceals the floor only where the audience it is cut for holds a creed the floor would offend — so that the corpus needs *concealing* robes and *sanctifying* robes as distinct species, with the audience's own criterion of legitimacy as the selector, and so that what a metropolitan robe manages is never the violence but the contradiction between the violence and the metropole's account of itself.

That a distinct species of legal fiction exists beside the colonial instrument that grants and withdraws in the same clause: the *anteriority claim*, by which a confiscator declares the incumbent to be the innovator and calls the taking a restoration. It is unfalsifiable by construction, because it appeals to a period beyond documents; and the catastrophe that licenses the restoration is the same event that destroyed the evidence which could refute it, so that a restoration claim is strongest exactly where the record is weakest.

That the antiquity a regime claims is selected by present circumstance rather than inherited by memory, and that the selector is usually its current enemy — so that when a regime's claimed ancestors change, one should look at the frontier and not the archive.

That continuity of site is not continuity of memory: sanctity is maintained by use and outlives its story, while history is maintained by records and does not, so that what a later order inherits is characteristically a place without persons — an evidently authoritative monument with a vacant attribution, which is not a memory but a resource, accruing to whoever supplies the missing name.

That the deepest formation instruments are units of measure rather than messages, because a message can be weighed and rejected while a unit of measure is the thing in which rejection would have to be counted; and that the question to ask is therefore what a child cannot do without using the order's categories.

That the formation field is left open by capacity and not by intention — so that one should ask of a conquering order not whether it wished to form the conquered but whether its apparatus could constitutionally take them in, the sharpest single test being whether its clergy recruits from outside itself.

That exit has two locks and the second is technological: the more capital-intensive the agriculture, the shorter the exit ramp, so that an order investing in irrigation builds the walls of its own labour force whether or not it intends to.

That captivity sets the ceiling on extraction but the asset sets the terms — the treatment of a captive population tracking the substitutability of what it supplies rather than the degree of its captivity, because skill cannot be compelled and undifferentiated labour can.

That collective kin liability is the cheapest enforcement technology there is, because it relocates observation into the household where it costs the treasury nothing; and that where a legal code contains it, one should expect a state with limited surveillance capacity and a strong interest in immobility.

That a perpetual religious endowment shelters the asset from the sovereign rather than the income from the tax collector — so the diagnostic is not whether religious property is tax-exempt but whether it is confiscable, and an order that has permitted large-scale endowment has disarmed itself precisely for the emergency in which the weapon would matter, while its ordinary accounts show nothing wrong.

That a transfer of value between two orders is described differently at each end and that both descriptions face inward, so that the question of whether a payment was tribute or subsidy is usually a question about which side's archive survived.

That a purity-based formation generates persecution as a by-product of its routine operation, with no policy formed and — the decisive property — nothing to repeal, since a purity rule is not a decree but the shape of the world for those enforcing it.

That licensing a subject community's record is an information instrument and not tolerance: it buys a named counterparty answerable for a population, the community's

own authority behind the state's enforcement, and a written account the state did not pay to produce.

That a subject community's contemporaneous record understates the pressure on it while the fullest account of a suppression is written after the suppressor is gone, so that a persecution's scale is bracketed rather than measured.

That the strongest Defaults are held by mutual deterrence among the members rather than by shared benefit, the apex's real function being to be the arbitrator whose removal nobody can survive; that the test is what happens to each member if the apex vanishes; and that such an arrangement fails not when members stop being paid but when enough of them are debited simultaneously to combine.

That splitting a dangerous office is a trade and not a fix, reducing the magnitude of the worst case and increasing its frequency.

That a concession accretes into durable liberty if and only if it creates an institution with officers, an income and a memory — something capable of asserting the grant after everyone who made it is dead.

That protection from an apparatus is a function of where the appeal chain ends rather than of the quality of its lower courts, so that an order can possess excellent justice and no liberty at once.

That the four cracks by which a floor breaks are not alternatives but a sequence in which each disables the repair of the last, so that the diagnostic is the interval between shocks measured against the order's repair time; and that a metabolic debt is not paid in one famine but serviced across centuries in a declining ceiling, by populations that did not incur it, its true size measured by the maximum that is never regained.

That forced population transfer is a category of the sword invisible to any accounting that counts corpses, and doubly invisible where the transferred are valuable, because it then registers as an achievement.

And, largest of all, the finding the controlled comparison was run to produce. The framework's diagnostic on the seam asks whether the crown pays the local clergy. That question is right and incomplete, because there are two things a crown can buy. An order that *rents* — subsidising whatever priesthoods are already standing, each speaking only for its own city — buys cheap, transferable legitimacy, generates no official truth and therefore no official falsehood, and hands the whole arrangement intact to the next conqueror. An order that *purchases a monopoly* — one priesthood given exclusive doctrinal authority and jurisdiction, its competitors stripped of standing — buys a portable empire-wide sanction and, in the same act, does four things it cannot reverse: it manufactures an official falsehood in every province holding another confession; it forecloses its own ability to acquire a different formation instrument later, because the

monopolist will destroy the alternative; it makes its information about dissenting provinces dependent on the leaders of communities it periodically strikes; and where the purchased priesthood is a closed hereditary caste, it settles the confessional future of every province not already held, permanently, on the first day. Cyrus rented. Ardashir bought. Almost everything downstream follows.

The arc

A landscape opening and twelve modules, each with a framework function and its own title.

Landscape — Four Thrones and a Fire. An alluvium that paid for a plateau that was honoured, and whose people spoke Aramaic and were mostly Christian or Jewish; a dynasty holding four crowns in three countries, so that winning one battle acquired one of them; seven great houses claiming their patents from a king out of legend, of whom only two are attested in the period; and a temple warden's grandson in a small kingdom on the south-western edge.

1 — The Floor of Force. Two Hundred and Forty Princes. The nineteen years, the three battles and the four months that the single-battle story replaces; who was actually fighting, and why a devotional text that shrinks the empire it overthrew records without embarrassment the killing of a rival's seven children.

2 — The Settlement. A Bad Innovation. The crowns laid down and taken up again; the provincial fires put out and their endowments taken; a monopoly on doctrine sold to one man by name; and a confiscation conducted entirely in the vocabulary of restoration.

3 — The Robe. Your Own Ancient Records. A reclamation claim surviving mainly in the enemy's books and footnoted, by a Persian king, to the Roman archive; the tombs the dynasty carved beneath without knowing whose they were; ancestors acquired two centuries after the founding and put down within a century; and a burnt archive that made every claim unfalsifiable.

4 — Formation. Fourteen Years and Three Months. A calendar in which no day could be named without naming a god; a priesthood that could not recruit; the one instrument built to cross the language line and the three years it took to destroy it; and the four centuries in which the empire's richest province had its children formed by somebody else.

5 — The Cost Column. Neither Pay Nor Gratuity. A door shut by statute and by irrigation; a share of the crop assessed on the spot by a man with discretion; a head tax that defined the stratum which paid it; a law condemning a man's relations for his crime; and the water that was the whole of the benefit side.

6 — Extraction. In Their Pay Forever. The three ways a man could hold property and the one that put it beyond the king; the gold Rome paid that each side had to describe differently at home; a campaign whose object was cash, city by city, at prices set by what each town could raise; and what the whole apparatus was buying.

7 — Information and Suppression. The Temples Destroyed by His Fathers. A priest who carved his own career on four cliffs; a lamp taken from a sick man's room; a church council that recorded its own persecution at the king's invitation; and the rule that the fullest account of a suppression is written after the suppressor is gone.

8 — Elite Coordination and the Default. Another King from the House of Cabades. One family holding the heads of all three estates; a bridge built to face the founder's investiture relief; a king who had not the power to compel his own officer; and the eleven years in which a ledger was turned negative for every group with standing and means.

9 — Plurality or Foreclosure. Except That of the Sovereign. A competent judiciary with no ceiling above it; a charter granted to Christians because a king was fighting his own nobility; a charter taken by Armenians with cavalry during a succession crisis; and a decree given to the commons that vanished with the hand holding it.

10 — Change and Collapse. To Protect Their Own Property. Twenty-six years of total war; a river that moved in 628; a plague that took half the western provinces; fourteen kings in four years; and a defence of the empire's richest province conducted by men defending their estates.

11 — The Grim Accounting. The Immortal Soul. Four hundred and twenty-seven years in sword and in metabolic debt; a category of violence that leaves no bodies to count; a note called in 628 and still being serviced six centuries later; and the king who killed his brothers and is remembered as the Just.

12 — Convergence and Divergence. The Same Fire. Where this order meets the corpus and where it stands alone; the one decision at the founding that made everything downstream different; a colonial shape arriving in the third century without an ocean or a race line; the revision the case forces; and the strongest case for the defence, stated at full weight and answered.

A note on sources.

This front matter is descriptive and makes no primary-source claims of its own; every factual assertion about the case is established, with its sources and its flags, in the module where it appears. The study's principal debt is to Encyclopaedia Iranica, without which it could not have been written; and beyond that to Parvaneh

Pourshariati on the Parthian houses, Maria Macuch and Anahit Perikhanian on Sasanian law, Mary Boyce on Zoroastrianism, Jacob Neusner and the recent Talmudic-Iranological scholarship on the Jews of Babylonia, Robert McC. Adams on the Diyala, and to Ehsan Yarshater, A. Sh. Shahbazi, Touraj Daryaee, Rahim Shayegan, Josef Wiesehöfer, Giuseppe Gnoli and Matthew Canepa, whose disagreement about Achaemenid memory the third module reports rather than resolves.

Four Thrones and a Fire

Landscape · the ground and the orders standing on it on the eve of 224 — an alluvium that paid for a plateau that was honoured, a dynasty holding more seats than one battle could take, seven houses claiming their patents from a king out of legend, and a temple warden's grandson in a small kingdom on the south-western edge

The demand that had been made before

In the consulship of Caius Cestius and Marcus Servilius, in the year we call 35, envoys reached Rome from the king of Parthia. Tacitus records what they were sent to say, and the passage is worth having exactly, in the public-domain translation of Church and Brodribb:

> *He further added insult, and sent envoys to reclaim the treasures left by Vonones in Syria and Cilicia. Then too he insisted on the ancient boundaries of Persia and Macedonia, and intimated, with a vainglorious threat, that he meant to seize on the country possessed by Cyrus and afterwards by Alexander.*

The Latin behind the middle clause is *veteres Persarum ac Macedonum terminos* — the old boundaries of the Persians and the Macedonians. The king who sent the message is the Arsacid whom Tacitus calls Artabanus, numbered second or third depending on which modern reckoning one follows, and he was a Parthian, of a house out of the northeastern steppe, ruling from Mesopotamia the ground the Achaemenids had once held.

Hold that, because almost two centuries later a Roman historian would report a demand of the same shape from a different man. Herodian has Ardashir, the founder of the dynasty this study follows, informing Rome that the whole continent facing Europe was his by inheritance, that it had been governed by Persian officers from Cyrus down to the Darius whom Alexander overthrew, and that it was therefore proper for him to recover what the Persians had formerly possessed. That report is the single most frequently cited piece of evidence for the proposition that the Sasanians remembered the Achaemenids and rose to restore them.

It cannot bear that weight alone, and Tacitus is the reason. The demand was already in circulation. Parthian kings had taken the Achaemenid title *King of Kings* onto their coinage; they put on the reverse of those coins a seated archer drawn from Achaemenid

royal symbolism; a line of scholarship, argued from the ancestor cult attested in the excavations at Old Nisa and from Ctesias's report that Artaxerxes II had been called Arsaces before his accession, holds that the Arsacids claimed descent from that same Achaemenid king, and another line — Wolski's, and Neusner's after him — holds the claim to be an ideological fiction assembled later and read backwards. What is not in dispute is that a Roman audience had heard a king in Ctesiphon lay claim to the ground of Cyrus and Alexander long before any Sasanian was born, and that the Roman authors who report the later demand had the earlier one in their own literature.

So the study opens on a difficulty rather than a foundation. The reclamation claim that the Sasanians are famous for is attested by Romans, in a form Romans had already recorded once, about a dynasty the Sasanians destroyed. Whether the Sasanians themselves held such a memory, in Iranian sources, in their own language, is Module 3's problem, and it will have to be settled without leaning on the men who wrote it down for a western readership. What belongs here, in the landscape, is only the correction it forces: the ground Ardashir took was not empty of claims. It was crowded with them, and most of them were older than he was.

The heart that spoke Aramaic

Begin, then, with the money, because it is where the difference from the preceding study in this collection actually lies.

Ardashir defeated the last Arsacid king in the field in the spring of 224 and took Ctesiphon on the Tigris, some thirty-five kilometres downstream of the later site of Baghdad; the sources place his coronation there in 224 or in 226, and both dates are in circulation. Around 230 he founded a new city across the water from it, called Weh-Ardashir by the Persians, New Seleucia by the Greeks and Kokhe by the Syrians, and over the following centuries the whole spread of palaces, suburbs and settlements on both banks acquired a collective name in the local language: *Māḥōzē* in Aramaic, *al-Madā'in* in Arabic — the cities. Ctesiphon remained the capital and the coronation city from Ardashir's accession until the Arab conquest in the 630s.

Now set two facts side by side and leave them there.

The first is that this was the empire's fiscal engine. The province the Persians called Āsōristān was the Mesopotamian alluvium — irrigated, densely settled, agriculturally the richest ground the dynasty would ever hold, and thickest of all along the lower Diyala basin on the east bank of the Tigris. The dynasty's own tradition called the region the heart of Ērānšahr, the heart of the realm of the Iranians.

The second is that almost nobody in it was Iranian. Encyclopaedia Iranica's summary of the point is blunt and this study will lean on it: although it sat in the heartland of the empire, Ctesiphon and the country around it were inhabited mainly by Arameans, Syrians and Arabs, who spoke Aramaic, and who were predominantly Christian or Jewish. The kings wintered there and summered on the cooler plateau where their own people were. The dynasty was Persian, out of Fars on the far side of the Zagros, speaking a south-western Iranian language written in a script derived from Aramaic; its ideological homeland held its dynastic fire and its royal tombs; and its revenue came from a floodplain of Aramaic-speaking cultivators whose confessions would shortly include two that claimed the whole world.

This is not, by itself, novel. The Achaemenids also drew heavily on Babylonia while holding their ceremonial ground in Fars, and the preceding study in this collection followed that division at length. What is new by 224 is the content of the gap rather than the gap itself. Cyrus's Babylonia held temple establishments whose gods were local, whose liturgies were municipal, and whose priesthoods could be subsidised into contentment because they wanted nothing outside their own cities. Ardashir's Babylonia held populations attached to universal claims — a Judaism that had survived the loss of its temple by becoming portable, and a Christianity whose adherents would within a century be co-religionists of the emperor across the frontier. A conqueror can rent a municipal cult. Renting a universal one is a different transaction, and the difference is much of what the later modules are for.

One more thing about this ground, and it is a prediction rather than a finding. The Mesopotamian alluvium is coordination-dependent capital of a kind the plateau's qanats are not: the qanat is dug and cleaned by the households it waters, while the great canal is a state undertaking. Robert McC. Adams's reconnaissance of the Diyala plains put the region's high point of settlement — in the number and the size of occupied sites — in its Sasanian phase, and the largest of the works that made that possible, the Nahrawan, is a creation of the sixth century that reached its maximum under the Abbasids. In 224 the alluvium is productive and it is not yet at its ceiling. The order this study follows will raise the ceiling itself, and in doing so will manufacture the largest single hostage to fortune it ever holds. Whether the note thereby incurred was called by war, by hydrology or by the conquest is Module 11's question, and the landscape's contribution is only to establish that the debt had not yet been run up.

Four thrones

The recursion holds here as it holds everywhere, and this collection applies it rather than rediscovering it: a conqueror never meets a baseline, only an earlier build that

took. Ardashir met the fourth layer down. The Arsacids had displaced the Seleucids, who had displaced the Achaemenids, who had displaced whatever the Medes were — a question the preceding study left deliberately open.

Take the layer immediately beneath him at its true size. The Arsacids were Parni, a tribe from east of the Caspian who entered Parthia in the decades after Alexander's death; the dynastic era conventionally begins in 247 BC, and the Iranian plateau was not theirs entire until Mithridates I in the middle of the second century. From 247 BC to 224 is something on the order of four hundred and seventy years. That is long enough for a thing to stop being a conquest and become the weather. By the third century Parthian had displaced Greek as the language of the educated in Armenia; the Arsacid house had furnished the model of what a king was across a wide arc of country; and the dynasty had adopted, or manufactured, a descent from an Achaemenid ancestor and the titulature that went with it. A former conquest that reached the self-running pole is exactly what the framework predicts a conqueror will find, and it is what Ardashir found.

But the shape of the thing he found is unusual, and it is the reason for this module's title.

The Parthian order was a suzerainty over kings. The literature counts something like eighteen vassal kingdoms under the Arsacid King of Kings — Armenia, Media Atropatene, Adiabene, Osrhoene, Gordyene, Characene at the head of the Gulf, Elymais, the city-state of Hatra, and Persis, among others. Some were Seleucid inheritances; some had reappeared out of the Seleucid collapse; some were run by Arsacid princes installed from the centre. And the dynasty itself had branched. An Arsacid line reigned in Armenia, secured there under Tiridates I in the settlement with Nero and lasting until the fifth century; another reigned in Iberia; another in Caucasian Albania. Toumanoff's term for the arrangement, carried in the standard reference literature, is a pan-Arsacid family federation.

So on the twenty-eighth of April 224, or thereabouts, when Ardashir killed Artabanus on a plain nobody has since located, he did not end the Arsacids. He took one of their four thrones. Cassius Dio records that the sons of the dead king fled to Armenia, where the family still held a crown and where Rome had an interest in seeing it kept. The family feud that followed separated the Armenian Arsacids permanently from the usurping new rulers of Iran, and the Sasanian determination to have Armenia — which produced war after war with Rome for four centuries — is legible from this fact alone, without any appeal to temperament.

This is the landscape's sharpest structural observation and it deserves stating plainly. The preceding study found that an empire whose apex is a *seat* is transferable:

resistance to conquest varies inversely with the switchability of the local apex, and an order held by charter changes hands at the top with almost nothing visible happening underneath. The Arsacid apex was not a seat. It was a lineage that held several seats, in several countries, under two different protecting powers. An apex of that construction cannot be assumed by winning a battle, because the battle disposes of one office and leaves the others standing, occupied by men with the same name, the same claim and a foreign patron. What Ardashir acquired at Hormozdgan was a throne. What he inherited with it was a dynasty of rivals who did not go away, and a nobility that had served that dynasty for centuries and would go on regarding the new house as one claimant among Iran's great families rather than as a different order of being.

The seven, and the two that are attested

Which brings us to the great houses, and to the first place in this study where the standing correction has to be applied hard.

The later Iranian tradition names seven: Suren, Karen, Mihran, Ispahbudhan, Spandiyadh, Varaz and Zik, each with its own country, its own forces and a hereditary claim on particular offices of state. The seats given for them in that tradition are Sakastan for the Suren, Ray for the Mihran, Nahavand for the Karen, Gurgan and Tabaristan for the Ispahbudhan, Adurbadagan for the Zik. They were Parthian, not Persian; they had been the Arsacid order's coordinating class; and they survived the change of dynasty entirely intact, furnishing the new empire's generals for four hundred years and producing, at the end of it, the men who both made and unmade its last kings. Parvaneh Pourshariati's reading of the Sasanian state as a Sasanian–Parthian confederacy — royal authority resting on negotiated loyalty with these houses rather than commanding them — is the strongest modern statement of the position, and it is contested; it will be tested against the evidence in Module 8 rather than adopted here.

Now the correction, and it is not a footnote. Of the seven, only two — Suren and Karen — are attested in sources that can be dated to the Parthian period. The canonical list of seven comes to us through material shaped long afterwards. And the houses' own account of where their standing came from is that they had been appointed to the highest ranks by Vishtaspa, the king out of the Avesta who is said to have received Zoroaster: a patent issued by a Kayanian, which is to say by a figure of legend from the eastern Iranian heroic tradition. Vladimir Lukonin's caution on the point is that members of these families may well have composed their own genealogies in order to emphasise their antiquity, and this study will hold that caution rather than resolve it.

Read as this collection reads documents, that is a finding rather than a difficulty. Ask of a genealogy who produced it and what he was scored on. A great house's charter

of nobility, written or maintained by the house itself, will claim exactly the antiquity that its present standing requires; the number seven is a shape a tradition reaches for; and a list that is complete and tidy in ninth-century material and ragged in third-century material is telling you about the ninth century. What matters for the landscape is not whether the roster is accurate but that the currency was already in circulation. The Iranian nobility of 224 was drawing its legitimacy from the Kayanian past — the same coin the Sasanian house would later be credited with minting. Legitimacy is borrowed and never minted, and the borrowing here runs in a direction that complicates the standard account: the conqueror's robe and the conquered elite's robe drew on the same treasury.

And the houses' position, read through position logic, predicts the next four centuries without needing anybody's character. A great house holds land, a following and an office. It needs a King of Kings — somebody has to arbitrate between the houses, lead the field army and keep Rome on the far side of the Euphrates — and it needs him weak enough that he cannot unmake it. Its optimal play is therefore never to abolish the throne and never to let any occupant sit securely on it. Nobody has to coordinate that; every house arrives at it separately, from its own seat, weighing its own benefit against its own credible cost. Module 8 will test whether that is what the record shows.

A priesthood with an address

What was standing on this ground in the way of religion in 224 is the hardest question in the landscape, and the honest answer is a short one surrounded by a long list of things we cannot say.

We can say that there were fires with buildings and wardens, and that a wardenship was heritable, an asset, and worth having — the evidence being that the dynasty about to take the empire was a family of wardens, which is the subject of the next section. We can say that the cult was public and had a minted iconography: the kings of Persis had been putting a fire altar on the reverse of their coins since the second century BC, with the king facing it, sceptre in hand. We can say that Middle Persian and Parthian were both written in scripts descended from the Aramaic the Achaemenid chancery had spread, that the Arsacids had inherited Greek as a language of government from the Seleucids and used it for a long time, and that the sacred texts of the Iranian tradition were transmitted orally in a language, Avestan, that had no script of its own until the Sasanian period.

What we cannot say, and must not import from later sources, is that there was a church. There is no securely attested Parthian-period chief priest, no attested canon, no

attested category of heresy, and no imperial patron of the cult in the sense the Sasanian centuries would supply. There is a long scholarly tradition of describing Sasanian Zoroastrianism as a unified state religion with a fixed creed, and a strong revisionist current arguing that it was far less centralised and far less doctrinally uniform than its own advertisements imply; this study holds the revisionist caution and will not read the later claims backwards onto 224.

The dating problem underneath all of this is severe and gets stated once, here, and then repeated at every point of use. Almost the entire Pahlavi religious literature — the Dēnkard, the Bundahišn, the Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag — survives as ninth- and tenth-century compilation, made under Islamic rule, by a shrinking community with excellent reasons of its own for describing a golden age destroyed by a foreign conqueror. The Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag's introductory chapters, which carry the account of Alexander burning the Avesta and killing the priests, are placed by the specialist literature after the Arab conquest. The most dangerous single error available in this subject is to quote a ninth-century text as third-century evidence, and the study will state the compilation date every time it opens one.

With that said, one item in that literature belongs in the landscape as a datum about the tradition rather than about the past. The Iranian account of how the scattered sacred texts were reassembled runs as a chain of royal authorisations, and the first name in the chain is not a Sasanian. It is an Arsacid — a king Valakhsh, who is said to have ordered the surviving fragments collected, both those written down and those preserved only in memory. A tradition maintained by a Sasanian and post-Sasanian priesthood, which had every reason to compress the Parthian centuries to nothing, nevertheless credits a Parthian king with beginning the recovery. That is the sort of incidental detail this method prefers to a central claim, and it points the same way as the seven houses' Kayanian patents: the materials the Sasanians would work with were already lying on the ground, in the hands of people who had been using them.

So the position of the priesthood in 224 can be stated without overreaching. Here was a body with practice, buildings, a hereditary personnel and a public iconography, which had gone roughly five centuries without an imperial patron. It had something to sell and, so far as the evidence goes, no standing buyer. The framework's prediction is immediate and testable: a conqueror who finds an institution in that position does not have to build a robe and does not have to do without one. He has to make an offer. What the offer was, and what was demanded in return, is Module 2's business.

The king of Persis

Now the man, approached the only way this collection knows how to approach anybody: by reconstructing what his position permitted, what it cost, and what he could see from it.

Fars had been under its own rulers for four centuries. Under the Seleucids they were *frataraka*, local Persian dynasts; after about 132 BC, as Arsacid power settled over the region, they took the title of king and ran their own coinage from Istakhr, minting in their own names with legends in Aramaic script. Encyclopaedia Iranica gives one of those legends as a specimen of the type, and it is worth having exactly, because it is a primary document and there is a public-domain rendering of it: *d'ryw MLK' BRH wtprdt MLK'* — Dārāyān the King, son of Wādfradād the King. On the reverse of coins of that line, a fire.

Two things follow from that small object. The first is that a man growing up in Fars in the early third century had in his hand, as ordinary currency, a statement that his country had kings of its own, in his own language, with a fire on the back. The second is onomastic and it will matter enormously to Module 3: the names in that line included Dārāyān — Darius — and Ardaxšīr, which is the Middle Persian of the Old Persian name the Greeks rendered Artaxerxes. The man who became the first Sasanian King of Kings was, in the local numbering of his own small kingdom, Ardashir the fifth of that name. He did not have to recover an Achaemenid name from a scattered archive. He inherited it from his immediate predecessors as a going concern.

His family's other asset was the fire. Ṭabarī, drawing on Sasanian material now lost, describes Ardashir's grandfather Sāsān as custodian of the temple of the fire of Anāhīd at Istakhr, and his grandmother Rāmbehešt as of the princely family called Bāzrangī, which held the local rule; Ardashir himself is placed by the same account at a village in the district of Khir. In 205 or 206 Sāsān's son Pāpak deposed Gōčihr the Bazrangid and took Istakhr for himself, and Ṭabarī reports that he did it at his son's urging. Ardashir had by then been placed with the commandant of the fortress at Dārābgerd and had succeeded to the post on the man's death.

The sources on all of this contradict each other irreconcilably and the contradiction should be on the page rather than smoothed. The *Kārnāmag* tradition makes the house descend from Darius III, the king Alexander overthrew. Ṭabarī makes Sāsān a temple warden and leaves the exact relationship to Pāpak unresolved, so that Sāsān is variously grandfather, father, or a man whose son was adopted. Agathias, writing from the Roman side, makes Sāsān a soldier who lodged with a cobbler and fortune-teller named Pāpak and fathered the future king on the cobbler's wife. And the discipline that governs this study asks who produced each of these and what he would have been

punished for writing instead. The temple-warden origin comes to us through the dynasty's own court chronicle. A house that would spend four centuries fused to a priesthood had every reason for its founder's grandfather to have been a priest, and the claim is therefore exactly what the robe would have manufactured had it not been true. It is held loosely here for that reason, and revisited in Module 1.

But the office itself is not in doubt as a fact about the family's standing, whatever the genealogy, and the guardianship of that temple stayed with the house to the end: Ardashir is reported to have sent the heads of his defeated enemies to it, Shapur II is said to have repeated the practice, and the last Sasanian king, Yazdegerd III, was crowned there in 632. Four hundred and eight years, one fire, the same family.

So fix the position. In 211 or 212 Ardashir becomes king of one of the roughly eighteen vassal kingdoms under an Arsacid King of Kings. His overlord has recently fought off a Roman invasion under Caracalla and is engaged in a civil war with his own brother, who is still striking coins. The Roman frontier has moved east within living memory and now sits on ground the Parthians used to hold. His own house has already demonstrated, at Istakhr in 205/6, that a local king can be deposed by a determined subordinate. He holds a fortress command, a mint, a following, and a hereditary religious office.

What his position lets him see is the decisive thing, and it is not ambition. It is that the apex above him is a chair a vassal king can reach, because vassal kings had at times simply declined to obey, because the Arsacid house was visibly divided, and because he had watched his father perform the smaller version of the same operation and survive it. What his position charges him is total: a defeated claimant is a dead man and his family with him. What it offers him in materials is a cavalry force he can equip — Bivar's reading of the evidence is that Ardashir had adopted the more flexible chain armour of Roman type while the Parthians were still in lamellar and scale — and a legitimating vocabulary already lying about the country in the form of local royal names, a fire on a coin, a priesthood without a patron, and a nobility that took its patents from a legendary king.

That is the position. Ṭabarī gives him ten thousand horse at Hormozdgan, against a larger Parthian force, on a plain where he arrived early and took the water. The figure comes from the winner's tradition and should be held as such.

Rome, permanently

One element of this landscape has no counterpart in the preceding study, and it changes everything downstream of it.

The Achaemenid empire faced no peer. It fought Greeks, Scythians and Egyptians, and it was eventually collected by a Macedonian army, but for two centuries there was no second state of comparable organisation permanently opposite it, contesting the same ground with a standing professional force. By 224 there was.

Septimius Severus had re-established a Roman province of Mesopotamia around 198, running from the Khabur to the western bank of the Tigris, and garrisoned it with two of the three newly raised Parthian legions — I Parthica at Singara, III Parthica probably at Nisibis. Nisibis itself had been made a *colonia* by 195 or 196 and became the province's capital. Osrhoene was organised as a province with Edessa as a dependent kingdom. The city of Hatra, out in the steppe between the rivers, had twice thrown Severus off its walls, in 198 or 199 and again in 200, and would shift its allegiance to Rome after the Sasanian accession — Latin dedications of 235 attest a Roman presence there — before falling to the Sasanians around 240 or 241.

The consequence for the order Ardashir was about to found can be stated without a single date after 224. He inherited a western frontier that had already been pushed back, garrisoned by legions in permanent quarters, facing a state with a professional army, a fiscal system, a road network and a documentary habit comparable to anything he could build. That commitment never lapsed. It ran, with intervals, for four centuries, and the last round of it will be the exhaustion Module 10 has to account for.

And it carries a second charge that will not present its bill for a hundred years. Rome in 224 is not yet Christian. When it becomes so, the Sasanian empire will contain, in its richest province, a large population sharing the confession of the enemy's monarch — which converts a fiscal asset into a security problem by a change of policy in another country. The SEED for this study proposed that Sasanian confessional statehood may be a convergence by competition, two empires arriving at the same instrument because each faced the other. That hypothesis is planted here and settled nowhere near here.

The people the arrangement was made about

None of the above says what it was like to be governed, and the landscape should close where the preceding study closed: with the man the arrangement was made about, who was not consulted.

He is, most often, an Aramaic-speaking cultivator on irrigated land in the Sawad, some days' journey from Ctesiphon. He pays whoever holds the capital. His grandfather paid an Arsacid; his great-grandfather's great-grandfather paid a Seleucid; his descendants will pay a Sasanian and then an Arab, and not one of those transitions is his to make or to resist. What he requires from whoever is on top is that the water be led, the assessment be bearable and no army come through. What he thinks of the King

of Kings is not recorded and was not solicited, because he is not the party the arrangement was made with.

But this case has something no other case in this collection has had, and it should be established on the first page rather than produced later as a surprise. One of the subject communities of this empire kept a sustained internal record of life under the arrangement — its own courts, its own negotiations with the fisc, its own rulings about which of the new state's claims it would treat as binding — and that record is public domain in English.

The timing is almost too neat. Rav returned from Palestine to Babylonia in 219, five years before Hormozdgan, and founded the academy at Sura, conventionally dated from about 225; his colleague Samuel headed the academy at Nehardea until his death around 254. The institutions that would produce the Babylonian Talmud were founded in the same half-decade as the dynasty, in the dynasty's richest province, and they went on producing for four hundred years.

And it is Samuel — the man leading Babylonian Jewry at the moment the Sasanians arrived — to whom the tradition attributes the maxim *dina d'malkhuta dina*, the law of the kingdom is law. The reference literature summarising the halakhot attached to that principle reports a set of rulings with a very precise shape: that the Persian rule of presumptive ownership of land is to be recognised even where it runs against Jewish law; that a sale of land confiscated by the government for non-payment of tax is valid *if* the unpaid tax is the land tax; and that it is not valid if the unpaid tax is the poll tax. A subject community's jurists, within a generation of a conquest, working out exactly which of a new state's claims they will treat as law — and drawing their line at precisely the levy that has been the marker of subject status for two millennia.

That is not the landscape's finding to make. It is Modules 5, 6 and 9's, and the exact wording will have to be established against the text rather than against a summary of it. What belongs here is only the statement that the material exists, that its production began in 219, and that this study is therefore in the unusual position of being able to hear the arrangement described from underneath.

Reading the landscape against the framework

One contribution, and four predictions carried forward.

The contribution is about the shape of the apex a conqueror takes. The preceding study in this collection established that an order whose apex is an *office* is transferable — that resistance to conquest varies inversely with the switchability of the local seat, that an inherited floor terminates against societies presenting no re-sourceable chair, and that two centuries of chartering installed the naturalised

assumption of a throne above the local order, which is exactly what made the empire disposable in four years. The Field Manual generalises this into the cheapest item on the whole Menu: *assume the chair*, occupy the seat from which the conquered order was already administering its own answer, and run the incumbent mechanism unchanged.

Sasanian Iran begins with a case the corpus has not yet met, and it should be named: **an apex vested not in a seat but in a lineage holding several seats, in several countries, under more than one protecting power.** The Arsacid apex was a family federation — Parthia, Armenia, Iberia, Caucasian Albania — sitting above something like eighteen vassal kingdoms and a nobility of great houses with their own lands and forces. Against an apex of that construction, the chair cannot be assumed, because winning the battle disposes of one office and leaves the rest standing, occupied by men with the same name, the same claim and, in Armenia's case, a Roman patron who will fund them. The former holders therefore do not disappear from the record after the conquest. They persist inside the new order as a permanent counter-elite with standing and means — which is precisely the condition the framework identifies as the fracture point of any hierarchy.

Two corollaries follow, and they are testable. First, a conquest of a multi-seated apex should be *slow* where a conquest of a single-seated one is fast: the preceding study's empire changed hands in four years, and Ardashir's consolidation should be measurable in campaigns rather than in a battle. Second, and this is the one that matters for the rest of the study, **the cost of the incomplete conquest is not paid at the founding but as a standing charge on the whole life of the order.** If Module 8 finds Parthian houses making and unmaking Sasanian kings for four centuries, and Module 10 finds the last dynastic collapse running through the same families, then the crack that ends this empire was opened on the day it was founded, by the part of the apex that Hormozdgan did not reach.

The predictions, held as predictions. First, on the direction in which a defeated order is distorted. The preceding study's rule was that a defeated order's dimensions in the record are a function of the victor's need, and that one should expect the first thing a founder overthrows to be reported as an empire. This case may run the rule in reverse, and if it does the rule generalises usefully: the *direction* of the distortion should be predicted by whether the successor's claim is one of conquest or one of restoration. A conqueror who claims to have overthrown inflates his predecessor, because a large defeat is a large victory. A conqueror who claims to have *restored* has to shrink the man he actually beat, because the interval between the golden age and the restoration must be a disorder rather than a reign — a legitimate predecessor being a competing claim.

Whether the Iranian national history in fact compresses the Parthian centuries, and on what evidence, is Module 3's to establish; this module only registers what to look for.

Second, on the order of assembly. The framework's standard sequence is floor first, robe laid over afterwards to make the force cheap. The house that took this empire appears to have held a hereditary religious office before it held a throne, and to have kept that office for the whole four hundred years. If the sequence really runs seam-before-floor, that is a structure the corpus does not yet name — and the caution is that the evidence for it comes through the dynasty's own chronicle, which is exactly the source that would invent it. Module 1 tests it.

Third, on the currency. Legitimacy is borrowed and never minted, and this landscape finds the borrowing running in an awkward direction: the Kayanian past that the Sasanians are credited with mobilising was already the currency of the nobility they inherited, and the Achaemenid claim on Rome that the Sasanians are credited with making had already been made by the dynasty they destroyed, in the year 35, and recorded by Tacitus. Module 3 will have to establish what was actually new.

Fourth, on the two hearts. The empire's ideological centre and its fiscal centre were different places, holding different languages and, increasingly, different gods — with the fiscal centre's populations attached to universal confessions of a kind the Achaemenids never had to price. Modules 6, 7, 10 and 11 all run through that gap.

And one discipline restated, because this subject punishes its absence more than most. Everything favourable ever written about this dynasty's origin was written by the dynasty, by the priesthood it endowed, or by Muslim historians working from a lost court chronicle it commissioned; everything unfavourable was written by Romans with a literary programme about Persian despotism that runs unbroken from Herodotus to Procopius. There is no neutral witness here either. The question to ask of every document is not whether it is true but who produced it, what he was scored on, and what he would have been punished for writing instead.

A note on sources. **Quoted exactly, from public-domain sources:** Tacitus, *Annals* 6.31, on the envoys of Artabanus and the ancient boundaries of Persia and Macedonia, in the translation of Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (Macmillan, 1864–77), checked against three independent reproductions of that text; the Latin phrase *veteres Persarum ac Macedonum terminos* is given as reported in Encyclopaedia Iranica's article on Tacitus. The coin legend of the kings of Persis, *d'ryw MLK' BRH wtprdt MLK'*, and its rendering as "Dārāyān the King, son of Wādfradād the King," are quoted from Josef Wiesehöfer's Encyclopaedia Iranica article "Persis, Kings of"; the same legend is given in substantially the same form in the numismatic literature after

Sellwood, where it is attached to a specific king of that name. No other exact quotation appears in this module.

Paraphrased, not quoted, and the constraint declared here for the whole study: Herodian's report of Ardashir's demand to Rome (6.2.2) is summarised rather than quoted, because the standard English translation (Echols, 1961) is in copyright and no adequate public-domain English text has yet been located; the same applies to Cassius Dio's notice (80.3) that the sons of the last Arsacid fled to Armenia. **The Sasanian royal inscriptions — the Res Gestae Divi Saporis on the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt, Kirdir's inscriptions, and Narseh's Paikuli — will be paraphrased throughout this study rather than quoted, because their editions and translations (Huyse, MacKenzie, Gignoux, Skjærvø, Frye, Sprengling, Maricq) are modern; that constraint is stated here once and will be repeated at every point of use.** Dēnkard Book IV, which carries the chain of royal authorisations for the collection of the Avesta, is not among the portions E. W. West translated for the *Sacred Books of the East*, and the Valakhsh notice is therefore taken here from Encyclopaedia Iranica's summary of the tradition rather than from a translation of the text; whether a public-domain English rendering exists in Peshotan Sanjana's Bombay edition is being checked and will be reported in Module 3. S. J. Bulsara's 1937 English of the *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān* has not been located in an accessible copy and its copyright status is unestablished; the settlement and cost-column modules will proceed by inference if it cannot be used, and will say so. Rodkinson's English Talmud (1896–1903, reprinted 1918) is public domain, but it is abridged, does not follow the standard tractate structure, and omits material; any quotation from it will be flagged accordingly.

Paraphrased from modern scholarship, briefly and with credit: Encyclopaedia Iranica throughout, for Ctesiphon and Āsōristān (Kröger; Morony), the battle of Hormozdgān and Ardašīr's early career (Ṭabarī I 814 and 821 as transmitted by Nöldeke, 1879), the kings of Persis (Wiesehöfer), the Arsacid dynasty and its Achaemenid claims (the "Arsacids" articles), the Arsacid dynasty of Armenia and Toumanoff's pan-Arsacid family federation, and the history of the Avesta; A. D. H. Bivar on Ardashir's chain armour; Vladimir Lukonin on the great houses' genealogies and A. Sh. Shahbazi on which of the seven are attested in Parthian-period sources; Parvaneh Pourshariati's Sasanian–Parthian confederacy thesis, named as contested and not adopted; Mary Boyce on the Anāhīd temple at Istakhr; Robert McC. Adams, *Land Behind Baghdad* (1965), for the Diyala settlement sequence; Jacob Neusner and Josef Wolski on the Arsacid Achaemenid-descent claim as ideological construction, against Marek Olbrycht and others who argue it is early and real; and the standard reference literature on the Babylonian academies and on *dina d'malkhuta dina*.

Dates and figures, given as ranges or with their disputes attached. The battle of Hormozdgan is dated to 30 Mehr 224, which Encyclopaedia Iranica's article on the battle renders as 28 April and its article on the dynasty renders as 28 May; the site has not been located and is variously placed near Ram-Hormoz or Shushtar. Ardashir's coronation at Ctesiphon is given in the literature as 224 and as 226. Arsacid rule is dated conventionally from 247 BC, making roughly four hundred and seventy years to 224, but the dynasty's early chronology rests largely on inference from coinage and remains tentative. The count of Parthian vassal kingdoms as "something like eighteen" is an approximation drawn from the general literature and should not be treated as a register. Ṭabarī's ten thousand horse for Ardashir at Hormozdgan is the winner's tradition and is given as such. No population figure is offered for the empire or for Āsōristān, because the estimates in circulation do not agree within a factor of two and none of the argument here depends on one.

This module's own weak links, stated where they would embarrass the argument. The seats assigned to the seven great houses come from later tradition and cannot be confirmed for 224. The temple-warden origin of the Sasanian house comes to us through the dynasty's own commissioned chronicle and is precisely the claim that a dynasty of this kind would have manufactured; the "seam before the floor" hypothesis in the closing section rests on it and is therefore held loosely. The phrase *del ī Ērānšahr*, the heart of Ērānšahr, is given in the reference literature as the Persian designation of the region and has not been traced here to a specific Sasanian document. Adams's Diyala chronology rests on surface ceramics whose Sasanian sequence he himself described as inadequately dated when he began. And the reading of the Arsacid apex as a multi-seated lineage — the module's one contribution — depends on the Iberian and Albanian Arsacid branches being in place in 224, which the standard chronologies support but which rests on thinner evidence than the Armenian case does. A reader who declines that will still find the Armenian branch alone sufficient to carry the argument, and should decline it consciously, which is what this note is for.

Two Hundred and Forty Princes

Module 1 · The Floor of Force — the nineteen years, the three battles and the four months that the single-battle story replaces; who was actually fighting, and why a founding legend that shrinks the empire it overthrew records without embarrassment the killing of a rival's children

The number in the first line

The Sasanian dynasty's own account of its founding survives, in Middle Persian, in a short prose work called the *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān*, the Book of the Deeds of Ardashir son of Papak. It was probably written in Pars towards the end of the Sasanian period, it was the work of priests, and it exists in an English translation of 1896 by Darab Dastur Peshotan Sanjana which is out of copyright and can therefore be quoted at the length the argument needs. This module leans on it heavily, and the first thing to do with it is to read its opening sentence for what it is doing.

> *The records of Ardashir, son of Babag, it is written as follows: That after the death of Alexander, inhabitant of Arum, there were in the territory of Iran two hundred and forty princes. Spahan (i.e. modern Isfahan), Pars and the borderlands that were nearest to them, were in the hands of Arvadan, the chief (king).*

That is the whole Parthian empire, in the dynasty's own founding text. Not an empire; two hundred and forty princes. Not a King of Kings ruling from Ctesiphon over some eighteen vassal kingdoms with Arsacid branches on the thrones of Armenia, Iberia and Caucasian Albania; a chief king holding Isfahan, Pars and the country next door. Four hundred and seventy years — from the Parni entering Parthia to the spring of 224 — are covered by the phrase *after the death of Alexander*, as though nothing had intervened between the catastrophe and the restorer but a scatter of princes.

Ask of that sentence who produced it and what he was scored on. It was produced by the priesthood of the dynasty that took the throne, in a text whose purpose is to establish that the throne was Ardashir's by destiny. A man who claims to have *conquered* an empire wants that empire to have been large, because a large defeat is a large victory; that is the rule the preceding study in this collection derived from Herodotus's Medes. A man who claims to have *restored* a kingdom wants the interval between the golden age and himself to have been a disorder, because an interval with a

legitimate king in it is a competing claim on the same seat. The Landscape offered that as a prediction. The first line of the *Kārnāmag* is the prediction met, in a public-domain primary text, before the module has begun.

And notice what the same text does not bother to hide. Two sentences later:

> *Babag was the frontier governor of Pars, and [was] one of the commissioners appointed by Ardavan.*

The founder's father held his office from the man the founder killed. A hagiography that has just erased an empire records without difficulty that its own hero's family were the overthrown king's appointees, because a Sasanian audience did not need Papak to have been independent; it needed the *khwarrah*, the Glory of the Kayanians, to have come to his son. That is a useful early lesson about this source and about the whole corpus of Sasanian self-description. It is not a document that conceals. It is a document that sanctifies, which is a different operation, and this module ends on the difference.

What the floor actually had to break

The single-battle story is very well established and it is wrong in a way that matters.

The version in general circulation runs: Ardashir, a vassal king of Persis, met his overlord Artabanus on the plain of Hormozdgan on 28 April 224, killed him, took Ctesiphon, and founded an empire. Every element of that is attested. But the sequence it compresses is nineteen years long at the near end and at least another sixteen at the far end, and the compression is itself the artefact this module exists to open.

Take the near end first. In 205 or 206 — the date is Ṭabarī's, transmitted through Nöldeke's German of 1879 — Ardashir's father Papak deposed Gōčihr, the Bazrangid ruler at Istakhr, and took the kingship of Persis for himself; Ṭabarī has him do it at his son's urging. Ardashir by then held the command of the fortress at Dārābgerd, which he had inherited from Tīrī, the man his father had placed him with. On Papak's death the elder brother Shapur took the throne and Ardashir took it from him; the standard chronologies give Ardashir's reign in Persis from 211 or 212. He then conquered his neighbours — Kerman, Isfahan, Susiana, Mesene at the head of the Gulf — while his overlord was occupied with a Roman invasion under Caracalla in 217 and with a civil war against his own brother Vologases VI, who went on striking coins throughout.

So on the day of Hormozdgan the challenger had been in arms for something between twelve and nineteen years, depending where one starts the count, and had already annexed four provinces. Ṭabarī gives him ten thousand horse against a larger Parthian force; some of them, on A. D. H. Bivar's reading of the evidence, in the more

flexible chain armour of Roman type while the Parthians were still in lamellar and scale. He reached the ground first, dug a ditch, and took the spring. Artabanus was killed, and his chief secretary Dād-windād was executed afterwards. The battle site has never been located, and Encyclopaedia Iranica's two relevant articles give different Gregorian equivalents — 28 April in the entry on the battle, 28 May in the entry on the dynasty — for the same Iranian date of 30 Mehr.

Now the far end, and here the correction comes from the other side entirely. Cassius Dio was a Roman senator, twice consul, writing within a decade of these events, and Earnest Cary's Loeb translation of his history is in the public domain. His account of what the new king had done reads:

> *For Artaxerxes, a Persian, after conquering the Parthians in three battles and killing their king, Artabanus, made a campaign against Hatra, in the endeavour to capture it as a base for attacking the Romans. He actually did make a breach in the wall, but when he lost a good many soldiers through an ambuscade, he moved against Media. Of this country, as also of Parthia, he acquired no small portion, partly by force and partly by intimidation, and then marched against Armenia. Here he suffered a reverse at the hands of the natives, some Medes, and the sons of Artabanus, and either fled, as some say, or, as others assert, retired to prepare a larger expedition.*

Three battles. Not one. A breach at Hatra that did not produce the city — Hatra held for another sixteen years and fell only in 240 or 241, under Shapur. Media taken partly by force and partly by intimidation, which is a Roman senator's polite phrase for a negotiated submission. And a defeat in Armenia inflicted, in the same clause, by the local population, by Medes, and by the sons of the man killed at Hormozdgan.

That last item is the Landscape's central structural claim confirmed by a hostile witness within ten years. The Arsacid apex was not a seat but a lineage holding several seats; killing the holder of one of them left the others occupied, and the sons of the dead king had somewhere to go and someone to fund them. Dio, who had no interest in the point and was making a different argument about the danger to Rome, records the mechanism in passing.

And the dynasty's own text agrees, which is the strongest kind of corroboration this method recognises — the incidental detail that runs against the interest of the man writing it. The *Kārnāmag*, having brought Ardashir to Pars, does not give him a single victory. It gives him a war:

He collected soldiers in large numbers from Kerman, Mokristan, Spahan, and different districts of Pars, and came to fight with Ardavan (himself.) There was fighting and slaughter of many every day for four months.

Four months of daily fighting, in a devotional text written to establish that the Glory of the Kayanians was with him. And the same text records that Artabanus was not passive: *Ardavan sent for soldiers and provisions from different frontiers, such as Rai, Damawand, Delman [= modern Gilan], and Patashkhvargar* — which is to say the Parthian side was calling in the northern and Caspian country while the southern provinces went over.

Set the three accounts side by side and the floor of this order comes into focus. It was not laid in an afternoon on a plain nobody can find. It was laid over roughly two decades of provincial conquest, then a four-month campaign, then three pitched battles, then a failed siege, a negotiated submission in Media, and a defeat in Armenia — and it was still not laid, because the Landscape's other three Arsacid thrones were still occupied and would be a problem for four centuries.

Who was actually fighting

The framework asks, of every founding, who held organised violence and how. The answer here is the most important single fact in the module and it is not the one the national tradition supplies.

The Sasanian conquest was not a Persian rising against Parthians. It was a redistribution of the apex *within* the Iranian military aristocracy, with a Persis dynast at its head and a substantial part of the Parthian nobility on his side. The reports are that the houses of Suren and Ispahbudhan backed Ardashir against their own King of Kings; the Karen appear on the other side of the ledger in the later tradition; and whatever the precise alignments — and they come to us through sources with their own dynastic interests, which is a caution and not a dismissal — the structural point is secure, because the empire that followed was officered by these families for four hundred years. A conquest that ends with the defeated order's aristocracy holding the new order's high commands was not a conquest of that aristocracy.

The instrument itself was cavalry. Ṭabarī's ten thousand horse are the heavy armoured lancers whose descendants the sources call the *savārān*, and they were not a standing royal army in any modern sense: they were the followings of the houses, brought to the field by their lords, equipped at their own expense, fighting under their own commanders. That is a floor of force with a specific and consequential property, and the Field Manual names it precisely in another connection — a grant that buys

armed service leaves a rival with a retinue. Ardashir did not have to make that grant, because the retinues already existed and he had persuaded some of their owners to bring them. The consequence is the same either way. From the first day of the order, the army that made the king was the sum of the houses' cavalry, and could at any moment become the army that removed him.

What is entirely absent from every account, on both sides, is anybody below the aristocracy choosing a side. There is no peasant movement in the *Kārnāmag*, none in Dio, none in Ṭabarī. The Aramaic-speaking cultivators of the Sawad, who were about to become the largest single source of the new empire's revenue, do not appear in the narrative of the war at all — not as partisans, not as victims, not as a factor either commander weighed. The framework's expectation is that structural change is an elite event and that the common people are present at every rupture as soldier, crowd and body count but never as the agent. Here they are not even present as the crowd. The transfer of the largest political apparatus west of India was accomplished by perhaps a few tens of thousands of armoured horsemen, and the people the arrangement was made about were not consulted, not mobilised, and — so far as the record shows — not asked.

There is one exception, and it is instructive because of how it is described. The *Kārnāmag* has men come over to Ardashir on his flight to the sea:

> *Several of the inhabitants of Pars, who had been distressed by Ardavan, placed their wealth, property, and themselves at his disposal, and expressed (to him their) unanimity and submission.*

That is not a popular rising either. It is defection by men who had *wealth and property* to place at a claimant's disposal, which is to say the local propertied class doing what the framework predicts any positioned actor does: weighing the benefit of a new arrangement against the credible cost of the old one, with the materials to hand. The next sentence names one of them — Banāk of Isfahan, who arrived *with his six sons, many soldiers and heroes*, and whom Ardashir at first suspected of coming to arrest him. This is the whole political sociology of the founding in one paragraph: men with retinues, changing sides, on terms, each unsure of the other.

The conquest that did not finish

The most useful thing in the *Kārnāmag* is a sentence its author cannot have intended as an admission.

> *Afterwards Ardashir marched towards different frontiers, and fought many bloody battles with the principal rulers of the territory of Iran. But always when one of the frontiers was restored to order, another rose in perfidy and unsubmission.*

That is the founding of the Sasanian empire described, in the founding legend, as a whack-a-mole. And the episodes the text goes on to relate bear it out with unusual specificity. Ardashir campaigns against Mādīg, king of the Kurds, and *the army of Ardashir (finally) sustained a defeat* — a straightforward reverse, recorded in a panegyric — before returning with four thousand men and taking them by a night attack in which a thousand Kurds are killed and the rest wounded or enslaved, their king and his family deported to Pars. He then loses his baggage train to the forces of Haftān-bōxt, the lord of the Worm, in Gūlār; loses a second engagement there; is besieged and starved in his own siege lines; and is finally reduced to riding away alone down the coast.

And then, while he is pinned in front of the Worm's fortress, a magnate of his own home province turns on him:

> *When Mitrok, son of Anoshepat, an inhabitant of Zarham in Pars, heard that Ardashir was without provision near the capital of the Worm, and obtained no victory over its army; he accoutered his troops and heroes, marched towards the residence of Ardashir, and carried away all the wealth and riches of Ardashir's treasure.*

The founder of the empire, some years into his reign as King of Kings, has his treasury sacked by a Persian nobleman from his own district while he is bogged down in a provincial siege. That is the true condition of the floor in the years after Hormozdgan, reported by the dynasty's own priests, and it should be set beside the finding this collection carried in from the preceding study: that an order whose apex is a single re-sourceable seat can change hands in four years with several of its countries never defended at all. Nothing of the kind happened here. This conquest took two decades to reach the capital and did not finish for years afterwards; it lost battles; it failed at Hatra; it was beaten in Armenia by the dead king's sons; and its own founding text describes the frontiers rising one after another.

The Landscape proposed that a multi-seated apex cannot be assumed, only contested, and that a conquest of one should be measurably slower than a conquest of a single-seated one. That is the first prediction of this study, and Module 1 finds it holding.

The violence the legend does not hide

Now the part of this module that is most likely to surprise a reader who comes to it from the colonial cases in this collection.

In the Algerian study, the method was to set the public words beside the private words and let the gap speak: the capitulation of 1830 promising to respect the inhabitants' liberty and religion, beside Montagnac's letter about killing all the men. The gap was the finding, and the mechanism was concealment — a metropole that believed in law had to be kept from seeing what the floor was doing in its name.

There is no such gap here, because there is no such concealment. The *Kārnāmag* is a devotional text, composed by priests, in praise of the founder, and it records the following.

That Ardashir, on the advice of an Indian sage that the kingdom could only be secured by a union of his line with that of his enemy Mitrok, responded thus:

> *In consequence of wrath and malice, Ardashir went to the dwelling of Mitrok; and ordered that all his children should be belabored and killed.*

Seven children, of whom the text says only one survived, a three-year-old girl hidden by the village authorities with a farmer. That is not an accusation by a hostile witness. It is the pious biography.

That Ardashir, discovering his wife had been sent poison by her exiled brothers, ordered her killed while she was seven months pregnant; that when the chief priest returned to say she was with child, he answered:

> *Don't stay a moment; kill her.*

The text's own resolution of that scene is that the priest disobeyed and hid her, so that Shapur was born, and that Ardashir later wept for what he had ordered when he saw a stag give itself to death to save its mate. The episode is in the book to demonstrate the operation of destiny and the king's capacity for repentance. It is not in the book as an indictment, and the compiler evidently did not expect it to be read as one.

That a thousand Kurds were killed in a night attack and their king, sons and brothers deported. That the lord of the Worm's fortress was stormed and *everything destroyed*, the survivors going *into bondage and submission*, and the fortress razed. That the treasure of the fortress was loaded onto a thousand camels.

And the stone says the same thing. At Ardashir-Khwarrah in Fars the king cut two reliefs to commemorate the victory, and the first of them is not an allegory but a triptych of personal killing: a Persian noble seizing a Parthian soldier; the prince Shapur

running the Parthian minister Dād-windād through with a lance; and Ardashir unhorsing Artabanus. The Parthian chief secretary is shown being impaled, by name, on a cliff face, permanently.

This is the module's finding and it is a genuine one. **A founding narrative conceals the floor only when its intended audience holds a creed that the floor would offend.** The colonial robe had to conceal because it was cut for a metropolitan public whose own legitimacy ran on the proposition that its state governed by universal law, so that a razzia had to be described as pacification or not described at all. The Sasanian founding narrative did not have to conceal, because it was cut for an Iranian military aristocracy and a priesthood whose criterion of legitimate rule was not lawfulness but *khwarrah* — the Glory, the fortune conferred by the gods on the man fit to hold the world, which the *Kārnāmag* represents as a great eagle that catches up with Ardashir on the road and after which no pursuit can succeed. Against that criterion, exterminating a rival's line is not a fact requiring management. It is evidence.

The distinction to carry forward is therefore not between orders that were violent and orders that were not. It is between robes that must **conceal** the floor and robes that may **sanctify** it, and the variable selecting between them is the creed of the audience the robe is cut for. This is an extension of the Algerian finding rather than a contradiction of it, and it makes that finding sharper: what the metropolitan robe was really managing was not the violence but the *contradiction between the violence and the metropole's own account of itself.* Remove the contradiction — pay the audience in a currency that rates fortune above legality — and the same acts can be published on a cliff.

The floor in stone, and whose belief it was buying

Two of Ardashir's rock reliefs need to be read structurally, and one constraint has to be repeated before they are.

The Sasanian royal inscriptions are paraphrased throughout this study and not quoted, because their editions and translations are all modern and in copyright. That applies to the trilingual labels on the reliefs discussed here, and it will apply to Shapur's great inscription and to Kirdir's when the later modules reach them. Where the wording matters, the module will say what the inscription is reported to say and name the constraint at the point of use.

At Naqsh-e Rustam, on the cliff face beneath the rock-cut tombs of Achaemenid kings, Ardashir had himself carved on horseback receiving the ring of kingship from Ohrmazd, who is also on horseback, facing him. The relief is dated to around 235 and is one of the earliest Sasanian reliefs. Under the hooves of Ardashir's horse lies

Artabanus. Under the hooves of Ohrmazd's horse lies Ahriman. The label on the king's horse, in Middle Persian, Parthian and Greek, is reported to identify him as the Mazda-worshipping lord Ardashir, king of kings of Iran, whose lineage is from the gods, son of the lord Papak the king; the label on the god's horse identifies him, in the Greek, as Zeus.

Read that as engineering rather than as art. The composition places the defeated Parthian king in the identical structural position to the Evil Spirit of the cosmos. The claim is not that Ardashir beat a rival. It is that the rival was the same kind of thing as Ahriman, and that the defeat of one is an instance of the defeat of the other. That is the most economical robe available to any conqueror, because it converts the founding act of force from a political fact requiring justification into a cosmological fact requiring only recognition. The framework has met this before in another idiom — a theodicy that removes the conqueror from the causal account is worth more than any robe he could commission — and here we watch the same work done from the winner's end rather than the loser's.

Then apply the sharpest diagnostic on the card. **Force never pays for what it does not need.** Ardashir had won. Artabanus was dead, his secretary impaled, his capital taken, his coinage replaced. Nothing compelled the new king to spend money and skilled labour cutting cliffs, and yet he cut them — at Firuzabad, at Naqsh-e Rajab, at Naqsh-e Rustam. The expenditure is the evidence that some audience's belief was genuinely necessary. So ask who could see them.

Not the Aramaic-speaking cultivator of the Sawad, who would never in his life come within five hundred kilometres of a cliff in Fars. Not the Jewish or Christian townsman of the Mesopotamian alluvium, for whom a mounted god handing over a ring would have been an object of positive distaste. The reliefs are in the Persian home province, on the road, at the dynastic sites, in three languages of which two are Iranian and the third is the language of the enemy state's diplomacy. The audience is the Iranian aristocracy whose cavalry made the king, the priesthood whose sanction he had purchased, and — in the Greek — Rome.

The Landscape predicted that the robe of this order would face its own coordinating class and its own homeland rather than the population that paid for it. Module 1 finds the prediction confirmed in the first thing the founder built.

The city that was round

One more object, because it makes the floor concrete in a way that arguments cannot.

In his home valley in Fars, in country ringed by the Zagros with only a few passes into it, Ardashir laid out a city on a circular plan roughly two kilometres across, ringed by a rampart and a moat and quartered by two axial roads running to four gates; at its centre stood a tower and a fire temple, and beside it his palace. He called it Ardashir-Khwarrah, the Glory of Ardashir. Whether it was founded before the victory over Artabanus or after it is disputed — Ṭabarī places it before, during the struggle for power, and the archaeological and architectural argument has been read both ways — and this study gives it as contested rather than resolving it. It was a mint as well as a residence, and Ardashir's coinage is struck at more than twenty mint signatures.

Two readings, and both belong in a module on force.

Structurally, it is a fortified capital with a treasury and a coin-press, in defensible country, in the province where his following lived. A claimant who builds that before he has won has understood what a floor is: not a battle but a place that cannot easily be taken from him, from which coin can be issued and men paid. Whichever date is right, the object tells you the same thing about the man's reading of his own position.

Ideologically, the circle is an argument. A city laid out as a perfect ring around a central tower states that there is a centre and that everything stands at a measured distance from it — which is precisely the claim a King of Kings makes against a confederation of great houses, and precisely the claim the next four centuries would fail to make good. The form outlived the argument: several later Sasanian cities were built on circular plans, and when the Abbasids founded Baghdad in 762 it too was round, with four gates.

Reading the floor against the framework

One contribution, one confirmation, and one flag carried forward.

The confirmation. The Landscape proposed that where the conquered order's apex is a lineage holding several seats rather than a single office, the chair cannot be assumed but only contested, and that the conquest should therefore be measurably slower and less complete than the conquest of a single-seated apex. The module finds it holding on three independent sources with opposed interests. Nineteen years from Papak's coup at Istakhr to the taking of Ctesiphon. Three battles rather than one, on the testimony of a Roman senator writing within a decade. Four months of daily fighting, on the testimony of the dynasty's own priests. A breach at Hatra that did not take the city, which fell only sixteen years later. A submission in Media obtained *partly by force and partly by intimidation*. And a defeat in Armenia inflicted by the sons of the king killed at Hormozdgan — the other thrones, doing exactly what the Landscape said they would do. Against the preceding study's empire, which changed hands in four years

with whole countries never defended, the contrast is stark and it is structural rather than a matter of anybody's competence. **The duration and completeness of a conquest are a function of how many seats the defeated apex occupies, not of how strong the defender was.**

The contribution, and it is the one this module offers to the corpus. The collection's colonial cases established that a founding narrative conceals the floor, and that the concealment is the order's central task — the capitulation at Algiers beside the field despatch, the seam that must be policed against the metropole's own eyes. That finding is sound and this module does not touch it. What this module adds is the variable that switches it on. **A robe must conceal the floor only where the audience it is cut for holds a creed the floor would offend; where the audience's criterion of legitimacy is fortune rather than legality, the same robe may publish the floor instead.** The *Kārnāmag* is a work of priestly devotion that records its hero ordering a rival's children killed and his own pregnant wife executed, and it records these things without apology because its audience's test of a rightful king was whether the Glory of the Kayanians had come to him, and slaughter is not evidence against that proposition. The Firuzabad relief shows a named minister being impaled. Nothing is being hidden. So the distinction the corpus needs is not violent orders against gentle ones, nor honest robes against dishonest ones, but **concealing robes against sanctifying robes** — and the selector is the creed of the audience whose belief the floor actually needs. This also sharpens the colonial finding rather than weakening it: what the metropolitan robe was managing was never the violence as such, but the contradiction between the violence and the metropole's own account of itself.

The flag, carried to Module 3. The *Kārnāmag*'s account of what was lost and what is being restored is not the account the modern reader expects, and the divergence is exactly what the pre-registered test of this study is about. There is no Cyrus in it. There is no Achaemenid dynasty in it. What there is, is *the line of King Dârâb, son of Dârâê* — a Darius son of a Darius — whose descendants, during *the evil reign of Alexander*, lived hidden in distant lands, wandering with Kurdish shepherds; and there is *Alexander, inhabitant of Arum*, which is to say Alexander of Rome. The catastrophe is remembered; the specific dynasty it fell upon is not; and the destroyer has been recoded into the enemy the third century actually had. Whether that is a memory degraded by five and a half centuries, a memory that never existed, or a memory reshaped to the present's needs, is the central question of Module 3, and Module 1 only establishes that the founding legend as we have it names a Darius, an Alexander who is a Roman, and no Achaemenids at all.

And one discipline restated. Legibility is not pardon. To reconstruct Ardashir's position — a vassal king with a fortress, a mint, a temple office and a following, facing an overlord distracted by Rome and by his own brother, weighing a claim on the apex against the certainty of death if he lost — is to explain why a capable man in that seat moved, not to endorse what the moving cost. The thousand Kurds killed in a night attack, the children of Mitrok, the deported royal family, the men who went into bondage when the fortress at Gūlār fell: these are in the ledger, and they are in the ledger on the authority of the people who admired him.

A note on sources. **Quoted exactly, from public-domain sources:** the *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān*, throughout, in Darab Dastur Peshotan Sanjana's translation (Bombay, Education Society's Steam Press, 1896), from the digitised text of that edition — the opening on the two hundred and forty princes and Ardavan's holdings (ch. 1), Babag as frontier governor and appointed commissioner (ch. 1), Sasan's descent from Dârâb son of Dârâê and the flight of Darab's descendants during Alexander's reign (ch. 1), the men of Pars placing their wealth and themselves at Ardashir's disposal and the arrival of Banāk with his six sons (ch. 4), the four months of daily fighting and Ardavan's summons to Rai, Damavand, Gilan and Patashkhvargar (ch. 4), the sack of Ardashir's treasury by Mitrok son of Anoshepat (ch. 6), the killing of Mitrok's children (ch. 11), the order to kill the pregnant queen (ch. 9), and the sentence on the frontiers rising one after another (ch. 11). Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 80.3, on the three battles, Hatra, Media and the reverse in Armenia, in Earnest Cary's Loeb translation (1914–25), which is in the public domain and digitised at LacusCurtius.

Paraphrased and not quoted, with the constraint declared: all Sasanian royal inscriptions, including the trilingual labels on the Naqsh-e Rustam investiture relief, because every edition and translation of them is modern and in copyright; this constraint governs the whole study and will be repeated at each point of use. Herodian's account of Ardashir's demand to Rome is likewise paraphrased rather than quoted, because the standard English translation is in copyright and no adequate public-domain text has been located. Ṭabarī's Sasanian narrative is used at second hand through Nöldeke's German of 1879 and the Encyclopaedia Iranica articles that transmit it, and is credited as such rather than quoted.

Paraphrased from modern scholarship, briefly and with credit: Encyclopaedia Iranica for the battle of Hormozdgān, for Ardašīr I's family and early career, and for the iconography of Sasanian investiture and triumph reliefs (the parallel of king and god trampling historical enemy and Ahriman, and the formulae *kē čihr az yazdān* and *mazdēsn bay*); A. D. H. Bivar on the chain armour; A. Sh. Shahbazi and the standard literature on the Firuzabad reliefs and their three combat scenes; Mary Boyce on the

character and probable date of the *Kārnāmag*, quoted in the source note to Sanjana's digitised text; and the archaeological literature on Ardashir-Khwarrah, its circular plan, its rampart, moat, central tower and four gates, and its influence on later circular foundations including Baghdad.

Dates and figures, with their disputes attached. Papak's seizure of Istakhr is dated 205/6; Ardashir's kingship in Persis from 211/2; the battle of Hormozdgan to 30 Mehr 224, rendered as 28 April in Encyclopaedia Iranica's article on the battle and 28 May in its article on the dynasty, at a site that has never been located; the coronation at Ctesiphon is given variously as 224 and 226; Hatra fell in 240 or 241. Ṭabarī's ten thousand horse for Ardashir is the winner's tradition. The thousand Kurds killed, the four thousand men in Ardavan's pursuit and in Ardashir's night attack, the seven sons of Haftān-bōxt and the thousand camels of treasure are all the *Kārnāmag*'s own numbers and are round numbers in a romance; they are given as what the text says rather than as counts. The founding date of Ardashir-Khwarrah, before or after the battle, is genuinely contested and is left so.

This module's own weak links, stated where they would embarrass the argument. The *Kārnāmag* is a romance, probably composed towards the end of the Sasanian period, three or four centuries after the events, by priests, and Boyce's judgement that its romantic character owes something to contaminating legends of Cyrus still current in Pars is a serious qualification of every narrative detail in it. This module uses it chiefly for two things it is well suited to — what the dynasty wished said about its own founding, and the incidental admissions that run against that wish — and not as a chronicle. Sanjana's translation is a century and a quarter old and its glosses are of their period; his parenthetical identification of Ardavan's seat as Stakhr, glossed as Persepolis, is not what the historical record supports and is reproduced here as part of the quotation rather than endorsed. The alignment of the great houses at the founding — Suren and Ispahbudhan for Ardashir, Karen against — comes through later sources with their own dynastic interests and is stated as report rather than fact; the structural claim that rests on it, that the Parthian aristocracy survived the conquest and officered the new order, does not depend on the specific alignments and is secure on other evidence. Dio's Book 80 survives largely in Byzantine epitome rather than in his own continuous text, which is a real limitation on the passage quoted here, though the three-battle detail is not the kind of thing an epitomator invents. And the reading of the Naqsh-e Rustam composition offered here rests on a paraphrase of inscriptions this study cannot quote; a reader who wants the wording must go to the modern editions, and should.

MODULE 2

A Bad Innovation

Module 2 · The Settlement — who got what: the crowns laid down and taken up again, the provincial fires put out and their endowments taken, the monopoly on doctrine sold to one man, and a confiscation conducted entirely in the vocabulary of restoration

The old deal, described by the men who ended it

Before the new settlement can be read, the one it replaced has to be stated, and there is a sentence that states it. It comes through Ṭabarī, in Hermann Zotenberg's nineteenth-century French, which is out of copyright, and it describes what the Arsacid King of Kings actually required of the kings beneath him:

> *Les Arsacides ne demandèrent pas obéissance aux Rois des provinces et ne les molestèrent en aucune façon ; seulement, quand un ennemi menaçait le royaume des Arsacides, ils réclamaient des Rois des provinces une armée que ceux-ci envoyaient de bonne grâce.*

The Arsacids did not demand obedience from the kings of the provinces and did not molest them in any way; only when an enemy threatened the Arsacid kingdom did they call on the provincial kings for an army, which those kings sent willingly.

That is a settlement in one sentence, and it is worth pausing on who is transmitting it. Ṭabarī's Sasanian material derives from the *Xwadāy-nāmag*, the Sasanian court chronicle, and therefore from the dynasty that overthrew the arrangement being described. This is precisely the case where the standing correction pays: a source describing its own enemy's constitution has every incentive to make it sound like weakness, and the sentence duly reads as an indictment — no obedience, no interference, an army only when the centre was in danger. But read for structure rather than for tone, it is not weakness. It is a *charter*, and a very cheap one: the provincial king keeps his crown, his revenue, his cult and his army, and owes military service on demand. It is the arrangement that had held for something like four and a half centuries, and eighteen or so kingdoms had found it worth defending.

The Sasanian settlement changed one term of that contract, and only one. It did not, at the founding, take the great houses' land. It did not reorganise the villages. It did not touch the assessment. What it changed was the *source of the title* — and then,

having changed it, it spent the next four centuries discovering what that had and had not bought.

The crown laid down and taken up again

The new terms are reported by James Darmesteter, working from the Letter of Tansar, in his introduction to *Le Zend-Avesta* (Annales du Musée Guimet, 1893), which is public domain. Darmesteter summarises the outcome thus:

> *Il supprime les Rois provinciaux qui ne veulent pas le reconnaître pour Roi des Rois et envoie leurs têtes au temple d'Anàhita. Une assemblée des Mages décide que ceux-là seuls garderont le titre de Shah, qui viendront déposer leur couronne aux pieds du Shàhinshâh et la recevoir à nouveau de ses mains.*

He suppressed the provincial kings who would not recognise him as King of Kings, and sent their heads to the temple of Anahita. An assembly of the Magi decided that those alone would keep the title of Shah who came to lay their crown at the feet of the Shahanshah and receive it back from his hands.

Read the mechanism rather than the ceremony. The crown is not abolished. The man is not replaced. What is inserted is a moment — a public, repeatable, witnessed moment — in which the office visibly ceases to be the holder's own and becomes something he holds from another man. This is the operation the framework calls novation, and it is the cheapest thing on the whole menu, because the administration does not change hands at all: the same king goes on collecting the same revenue from the same villages through the same men, and the only new cost is a journey and a bow.

Three things about it deserve attention.

First, the decision is announced by *an assembly of the Magi*. Not by the king, and not by the army that had won. The instrument that redefines the tenure of every crown in Iran is issued by a religious body, which is exactly what a settlement looks like when the party in possession of the sword wants the party in possession of the sanction to underwrite the terms. Whether such an assembly met is not independently attested and this study does not assert it; what is attested is that the tradition *needed* it to have met, which is a fact about the settlement's construction.

Second, the alternative on offer was death, and the disposal of the bodies was liturgical. The heads went to the temple of Anahid at Istakhr — the fire whose wardenship the Landscape established as the founder's family's hereditary office, and where the last Sasanian king would be crowned four centuries later. The floor and the

seam meet at a single address. A provincial king contemplating the journey to lay down his crown knew where the alternative ended up.

Third, and structurally most important: the vassal kingship was not abolished as a *form*. It was re-staffed. Shapur's great inscription at the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt — which this study paraphrases throughout and does not quote, because every edition of it is modern and in copyright — records members of the dynasty holding the kingships of provinces: a son as great king of Armenia, another as king of Mesene, another as king of Sakastan and the eastern country to the sea. The Sasanians did not replace kings with governors. They replaced other people's kings with their own sons, which costs nothing to invent and requires no new apparatus, and which converts a confederation of foreign dynasties into a family holding. Some kingships were simply extinguished — Persis's own, which Ardashir had held and which the lists mark as abolished at his accession; Characene at the head of the Gulf; Elymais. Others, like Adiabene, continued as Sasanian vassals with the name unchanged.

The Landscape called the Arsacid apex a lineage holding several seats and predicted that its seats could not be assumed but only contested. Module 2 finds the winner's answer to that problem, and it is the obvious one: if a multi-seated apex is what makes a conquest expensive, become a multi-seated apex yourself. It worked, in the sense that the Sasanian house did occupy the provincial thrones. It also meant that from the second reign onward there were always several men of the blood royal holding armies and provinces, which is a different problem and belongs to Module 8.

The fires they put out

Now the largest property transfer of the founding, and the one the sources let us watch being argued about.

The Letter of Tansar is a reply. Its addressee, Gushnasp, king of Tabaristan, had written to the new regime's chief priest with a list of charges against the usurper, and Darmesteter reports one of them in the king's own voice:

> *« Personne jusqu'à lui, disait Jasnasf, n'avait osé commettre un tel sacrilège. »*

Nobody before him, said Gushnasp, had dared to commit such a sacrilege. The sacrilege was that Ardashir had taken the fires out of the fire-temples and put them out.

And here is the answer, which is the sentence this module is named for:

> *« Ce fait n'est pas si grave que tu crois, répond intrépidement Tansar. Après Dàrâ, les Rois provinciaux établirent, chacun pour lui, un feu sacré : c'était une mauvaise innovation et contraire à l'usage des anciens rois. »*

This is not as grave as you think. After Dārā, the provincial kings each established a sacred fire for himself; that was a bad innovation, and contrary to the usage of the ancient kings.

Everything this module has to say is in the gap between those two quotations, so it is worth being very concrete about what was actually being taken.

A dynastic fire was not a flame in a room. It was an endowed foundation. It had a building, a staff of priests, and — the point — a permanent assignment of land or revenue to maintain it, made by a ruling family, bearing that family's name, and constituting the visible public sign of that family's standing in its own country. The scale of such endowments in the Sasanian period can be read directly off Shapur's inscription, which records fires founded for the souls of named members of the royal house and sets out their daily maintenance in livestock, bread and wine drawn from an existing customary surplus; again, that text is paraphrased here and not quoted. What Ardashir did to the provincial kings' fires, on the tradition's own account, was to raze temples, confiscate their endowments, and remove the fires themselves to their places of origin.

So the operation was: the confiscation of the aristocracy's religious foundations, together with the land and revenue attached to them, and the transfer of both the property and the sanctity to the centre. It was the single largest transfer of assets at the founding, and it was religious rather than agricultural — which is to say it took from the provincial elites the specific asset that made their standing look permanent and god-given rather than merely inherited.

And now name the fiction, because the framework's discipline is to name a legal instrument as a legal fiction and quote its exact wording.

The man conducting the confiscation calls the men being confiscated the innovators. Tansar does not argue that the crown needs the money, or that the fires were disloyal, or even that a unified cult is better than a scattered one. He argues that the practice being suppressed was *itself* an illegitimate novelty, introduced after Dārā by kings who had no authority to introduce it, and that abolishing it is therefore a return to the usage of the ancients. The new thing is described as the old thing; the old thing is described as the new thing; and the property moves.

This is a species of legal fiction the corpus should hold under its own name, because it is not the same as the colonial fictions already in the collection. When a French law declares that the Muslim native is French *nevertheless*, the fiction operates by granting a status and withdrawing it in the same sentence — the reader can see both halves and check them against each other. **The anteriority claim** works differently: it makes a factual assertion about a period from which no documents survive, and it is

unfalsifiable by construction. Tansar's ancient kings are before Alexander. The archive that would settle the question is the archive Alexander burned — and the burning is, in this same literature, the founding catastrophe. A restoration claim whose evidence was destroyed by the enemy is the strongest form of title available to anyone, precisely because nobody can produce the deed.

We will meet the argument again in Module 3, where the same structure is used to authorise a scripture. It is worth registering here that its first recorded use in this order was not to establish a doctrine but to justify taking somebody's land.

What the priesthood was paid

The Landscape left the priesthood as a body with practice, buildings, hereditary personnel and no imperial patron — something to sell and no standing buyer. Module 2 can now say what it sold and what it got.

The clearest statement of what it got comes from a hostile outsider. Agathias was an East Roman writing in the sixth century, with no interest in flattering the Persian priesthood, and Darmesteter renders him thus:

> *« Il était, dit Agathias, initié à la doctrine des Mages et en célébrait lui-même les mystères ; et avec lui la race des Mages, assez méprisée jusqu'alors, devint toute-puissante, et dans les affaires publiques et dans les affaires privées : ils ne sont pas seulement les conseillers toujours écoutés, c'est en leur main qu'est déposée la justice. »*

He was initiated into the doctrine of the Magi and himself celebrated their mysteries; and with him the race of the Magi, until then rather despised, became all-powerful, in public affairs and in private ones: they are not merely advisers who are always heeded, it is in their hands that justice is deposited.

C'est en leur main qu'est déposée la justice. That is not honour, and it is not influence. It is jurisdiction — the courts, and with them the law of persons, property, marriage, inheritance and adoption. And it is confirmed from the other side by the internal evidence: in the Sasanian scheme the judges belonged to the estate of priests, and the one surviving Sasanian legal compilation was written by a jurist of that class.

Set beside it what the priesthood gave. The Dēnkard's account of the collection of the sacred texts, again in Darmesteter's French:

> *« Artakhshatr, Roi des Rois, fils de Pâpak, dit le premier de ces textes, fit réunir dans la capitale, sous la haute autorité de Tansar, tout l'enseignement dispersé. Tansar vint. Ardashîr admit lui seul, enleva toute autorité à tous les autres et*

dit : « Désormais, nous considérerons comme contraire à la Religion Mazdéenne toute exposition dont la connaissance et les données ne découlent pas de lui. »

Ardashir, King of Kings, son of Papak, had all the scattered teaching gathered in the capital under Tansar's authority. Tansar came. Ardashir admitted him alone, stripped all the others of authority, and said: henceforth we shall hold contrary to the Mazdean religion any exposition whose knowledge and data do not derive from him. Darmesteter adds, and honesty requires reproducing it, that his translation of Ardashir's own words there is conjectural.

That is a monopoly on interpretation, granted by a king, to one man, by name, with all competitors stripped of standing in the same act. And the two halves of the bargain fit together exactly: the crown gives the priesthood exclusive doctrinal authority and the courts; the priesthood gives the crown the proposition that its rule is the order of the world rather than the outcome of a battle.

The contract is stated as such in a sentence attributed to Ardashir's testament to his son, reported by Masʿūdī and rendered by Darmesteter:

« Sachez, ô mon fils, que la religion et la royauté sont deux sœurs qui ne peuvent exister l'une sans l'autre, car la religion est la base de la royauté et la royauté la protectrice de la religion. »

Know, my son, that religion and kingship are two sisters who cannot exist one without the other, for religion is the foundation of kingship and kingship the protector of religion.

That sentence is usually quoted as piety. Read it as a schedule of consideration. Each clause names what one party supplies to the other: religion supplies the foundation — the ground on which the throne rests, the answer to why this family and not another — and kingship supplies protection, which for an endowed institution means enforcement of its property, its jurisdiction and its monopoly. Nothing in it concerns the governed. It is a description of a transaction between two parties, neither of whom is the population.

And the framework's diagnostic applies cleanly: **does the crown pay the local clergy?** In the preceding study in this collection, the answer was yes, and the payment bought an outsourced robe — local gods subsidised into contentment, each cult remaining local. Here the answer is also yes, but the currency is different and the consequence is opposite. Ardashir did not subsidise many priesthoods; he bought one and destroyed the standing of the rest. What that purchases is a single, portable, empire-wide sanction that travels with the dynasty instead of being tied to particular cities. What it costs is that the empire now has an official truth, and therefore, for the

first time in this ground's history, an official falsehood — and the alluvium is full of people who hold one.

The estates, and the one that had not existed

The settlement's map of society is the doctrine of the four estates, and it appears in the Letter of Tansar as though it had always been there: the priests, *āsrōnān*; the warriors, *arteštārān*; the scribes, *dibīrān*; and the husbandmen and artisans, *wāstaryōšān* and *hutuxšān*. Rank, position and legal standing all followed from which one a man was born into, and the scheme was taught as immutable.

Three observations, in ascending order of importance.

The first is that the scheme is not as old as it claims. A threefold division of society is attested in the Avesta; the fourfold one, with the scribes as a separate estate, is attested in late Sasanian and post-Sasanian sources, and Encyclopaedia Iranica's judgement is that although it was taught as immutable it does not seem to have reflected social reality, other divisions having gained importance during the Parthian period. So the estate doctrine is itself an anteriority claim — a present arrangement asserted to be ancient — of exactly the kind the fires argument used.

The second is that the novel estate is the *scribes*, and the novelty is diagnostic. The class comprises the bureaucracy, and with it physicians, poets and astronomers: literate men who serve the crown, hold no land of their own, and command no retinue. A king who has just left the great houses' estates and followings untouched needs precisely such a class, because it is the only instrument through which he can govern that does not have to be borrowed from the men he is governing against. The elevation of the scribes to an estate is the settlement's one genuinely constructive act — the creation of a constituency whose entire position depends on the crown.

The third observation is the one that matters most and it comes from Module 1's text. In the *Kārnāmag*, the dream that establishes the dynasty's destiny is a dream of three fires, and the interpreters read them thus, in Sanjana's public-domain translation:

> *the sacred fire Adar Farnbag the religious intelligence of the great men among the mobeds; the sacred fire Adar Gushnasp warriors and military chieftains; and the sacred fire Adar Burzin Mihr the farmers and agriculturists of the world.*

Three fires, three estates, in the founding legend, before the founder is born. The social order is not presented as an outcome of the settlement. It is presented as the content of a divine sign given to the founder's grandfather's patron in his sleep. That is the difference between a distribution and a distribution with a cosmology attached,

and it is the reason this settlement did not need to be renegotiated for four hundred years: a man who asks why the husbandmen are at the bottom is not asking a political question, he is asking why Ādur Burzēn-Mihr burns where it burns.

Which is Module 4's subject, and this module simply notes that the equipment for it was assembled at the founding.

What the houses kept, and why that was the price

Against all of this, the most consequential fact about the Sasanian settlement is a negative one: the great Parthian houses were not dispossessed.

There is no record of a redistribution of noble estates to Persian incomers, no confiscation of the Karen's or the Mihran's lands, no dissolution of the aristocratic retinues that had made the *savārān*. The houses kept their countries, their followings and their hereditary claims on the great offices, and they added to them access to the new imperial commands. Shapur's inscription — paraphrased, per the standing constraint — lists the ranks of the new court in descending order: kings, princes of the blood, the grandees, and the nobles; and Parthian family names sit inside that list. A settlement that leaves the coordinating class's material base intact and takes only its title-deed to legitimacy is the least expensive founding available, and the men who made it were not fools. Module 1 established that a substantial part of the Parthian aristocracy had fought *for* Ardashir. You do not confiscate the estates of the men whose cavalry won you the throne, and you cannot confiscate the estates of the ones who might yet unseat you.

So the settlement's real content, read from the houses' side, was: keep everything, gain access to more, and acknowledge a new source for what you already hold. Weighed by any lord with land and a retinue, against the credible cost of refusing — a head sent to Istakhr — that is not a close question. Position logic predicts they take it, and they took it.

It also predicts the bill. A conqueror who buys recognition without buying the means of coercion has rented his apex rather than bought it, and the rent falls due at every succession, every defeat, and every moment the crown reaches for something the houses would rather keep. This is not hindsight: the arrangement was legible on the day it was made. It is the standing subject of Module 8, and the reason the Landscape's four-thrones argument runs the whole length of this study rather than stopping at Module 1.

What the cultivator got

Nothing that any source records.

There is no act of the founding that changes the position of the Aramaic-speaking cultivator of the Sawad or the Iranian villager of the plateau. No manumission, no reassessment, no new court, no new obligation and no new relief. The estate doctrine placed him in the fourth division and told him it was immemorial. The fires that were extinguished were not his, and the fires that replaced them were not his either. He changed the name on the assessment.

The one thing we can see from underneath is the working-out, in the subject community that left a record, of which of the new state's claims would be treated as binding — the rulings attributed to Samuel of Nehardea, whose academy was operating at Nehardea in the very years of the conquest, recognising the new state's law of land while drawing a line at the poll tax. The exact wording and the tractate references belong to Modules 5 and 6, where they will be established against the text rather than against a summary of it. What belongs here is only the shape: the settlement was not made *with* the governed, and their part in it was to work out afterwards, among themselves, how much of it to obey.

The framework says the ruled are not a party to the settlement but its subject matter. Nothing in the Sasanian founding contradicts it.

Reading the settlement against the framework

One contribution. Every settlement rests on a legal fiction, and the corpus has so far catalogued fictions that operate by *granting and withdrawing in the same instrument* — the colonial statute that makes the native a national and then excludes him by the following clause. The Sasanian founding supplies a distinct species that the framework should hold under its own name: **the anteriority claim.** Where the beneficiary of a settlement cannot plausibly claim to be conferring something new, he asserts instead that what he is taking was itself an illegitimate novelty, and that his taking restores an older and truer arrangement. Tansar's answer to the charge of sacrilege is the pure case — *c'était une mauvaise innovation et contraire à l'usage des anciens rois* — and the same structure recurs across the settlement: the four estates asserted as immemorial when the fourth of them is new; the doctrinal monopoly asserted as recovery when it is a grant.

Two properties make this fiction unusually strong, and they are worth stating as diagnostics for other cases. First, **it is unfalsifiable by construction**, because the period it appeals to is beyond the reach of documents; the further back the claimed

original, the fewer people can check it. Second, and this is the sharper one, **the destruction of the archive is itself part of the title.** The reason nobody can produce the ancient usage is that the enemy burned it — and so the catastrophe that justifies the restoration also removes the only evidence that could refute it. A settlement of this kind is therefore strongest exactly where the historical record is weakest, which is the opposite of how a documented grant behaves. Where the corpus finds a founding order claiming to restore a lost original, the question to ask is not whether the original existed but **who benefits from its being unrecoverable.**

One confirmation, carried forward. The founding bought recognition and left the coordinating class's material base untouched: the houses kept their lands, retinues and hereditary offices, and paid in a ceremony. That is the cheapest founding on the menu and the most expensive aftermath, and it is the mechanism the Landscape predicted from the shape of the apex. Module 8 tests whether the bill was paid where the framework says it should be.

Two predictions, held as predictions. First, on the fisc: the confiscation of the provincial fires did not enlarge the crown's permanent resources so much as change the ownership of a sector, because the property was re-alienated almost immediately into new endowments — royal fires, founded for named souls, with perpetual daily charges on revenue. If that is right, the Sasanian crown spent the whole of its life with a large and growing block of land permanently outside the fisc under religious title, which is the same structure the corpus has met in monastic and *waqf* cases; and the fiscal crisis of the late empire should show it. Module 6.

Second, on the seam: buying one priesthood rather than subsidising many purchases a portable, empire-wide sanction and simultaneously manufactures an official falsehood in a province full of people who hold one. The Landscape flagged the fiscal heartland's confessions as the fault line of this order. Module 2 finds the instrument that turns them from a fiscal fact into a legal one.

And the discipline. Legibility is not pardon, and it cuts both ways here. To reconstruct the settlement as a rational instrument — recognition bought at ceremony price, jurisdiction sold to a priesthood, endowments moved from provincial families to the crown, an estate doctrine backdated into a dream — is to explain how a durable order was assembled by capable men from the materials in front of them. It does not make the confiscations just, and it does not make the fourth estate's position natural. It does mean that nothing in this settlement requires anybody to have been wicked. Each party weighed a benefit against a credible cost with what it had, and the sum of those judgements was an arrangement in which most people's place in the world was settled before they were born and explained to them as the shape of the sky.

A note on sources. **Quoted exactly, from public-domain sources:** James Darmesteter, *Le Zend-Avesta*, vol. III, Introduction, chapter II (Annales du Musée Guimet, tome 24, Paris, Ernest Leroux, 1893) — his rendering of Agathias on the Magi becoming all-powerful and justice being placed in their hands; his rendering of the Letter of Tansar on Gushnasp's charge of sacrilege and Tansar's reply about the provincial kings' fires as a bad innovation; his summary of the assembly of the Magi and the laying down and receiving back of the crown; his rendering of Ṭabarī, in Zotenberg's French, on what the Arsacids required of the provincial kings; his rendering of the Dēnkard on Tansar's exclusive authority; and his rendering, from Masʿūdī, of Ardashir's testament on religion and kingship as two sisters. The *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān* on the three fires and the three estates, in Darab Dastur Peshotan Sanjana's translation (Bombay, 1896).

A chain of custody that must be on the page, not in a footnote. The Letter of Tansar as we have it is a thirteenth-century Persian version, made by the compiler of a history of Tabaristan, of a ninth-century Arabic translation by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, of a Middle Persian original — and the Arabic translator, as Darmesteter observes, inserted Qurʾānic quotations and material from *Kalīla wa-Dimna* where the occasion allowed. The document in its present form is generally dated to the sixth century rather than the third, which means that what it reports of Ardashir's settlement is what a sixth-century Sasanian establishment wished said about its own founding. Darmesteter judged the substance authentic and rich in precise detail no Abbasid forger would have invented; the modern consensus is more cautious. This module uses it for what such a document is good for — the arguments the order made for itself, and the charges its opponents made against it, which the reply preserves — and not as a transcript of the third century. Every quotation above therefore reaches us through at least three translators and one interested compiler, and Darmesteter himself flags that his version of Ardashir's words in the Dēnkard passage is conjectural.

Paraphrased and not quoted, with the constraint declared: all Sasanian royal inscriptions, including Shapur's at the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt, from which this module takes the ranks of the court, the sons holding provincial kingships, and the endowed fires with their daily maintenance; every edition and translation of these texts is modern and in copyright, and this constraint governs the whole study.

Paraphrased from modern scholarship, briefly and with credit: Encyclopaedia Iranica on the class system in the Parthian and Sasanian periods (the four estates, the association of the three higher estates with the three great fires, and the judgement that the scheme was taught as immutable but did not reflect social reality) and on the Sasanian legal system (judges drawn from the priestly estate; the four aristocratic ranks

in Shapur's inscription); the standard literature on Ardashir's treatment of the provincial fire foundations — razing of temples, confiscation of endowments, removal of fires to their places of origin; and Mary Boyce's edition and dating of the Letter of Tansar, which is in copyright and is not quoted here.

On the Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān, as promised. S. J. Bulsara's *The Laws of the Ancient Persians* (Bombay, 1937) is reachable — it has been digitised — but this study will not build load-bearing argument on it, for two reasons that should be stated rather than left to be discovered. Its copyright position is unresolved: an Indian publication of 1937 is not straightforwardly public domain. More seriously, the specialist judgement is against it; Anahit Perikhanian, whose own edition superseded it, wrote that Bulsara's translation stands too far from the standards of modern scholarship to serve scholarly purposes. The reliable editions — Perikhanian's, and Maria Macuch's — are modern and in copyright. The consequence for this study is that the one surviving Sasanian law book will be used through paraphrase of the scholarship rather than quoted, and the cost of that will be borne mainly by Modules 5 and 9, which will say so at the point of use. The compilation is in any case late: its author, Farroxmard ī Wahrāmān, worked at Gur in Fars and the latest date it names falls in the 610s, so it is evidence for the sixth and early seventh centuries and not for the founding.

This module's own weak links. The assembly of the Magi that redefined the tenure of the provincial crowns is reported only in this tradition and is not independently attested; the module treats it as a claim the settlement needed to make rather than as an event. Which vassal kingdoms were abolished, which re-staffed with Sasanian princes, and when, is known unevenly and partly from lists compiled centuries later. The proposition that the great houses were not dispossessed rests on the absence of evidence for a redistribution, which is weaker than positive evidence, though it is corroborated by the houses' continuous presence in the high commands for four centuries. And the reading of the extinguished fires as primarily a *property* transaction rather than a religious one is an interpretation: the sources describe razing, confiscation and removal, but they do not give figures for what was taken, and none are offered here.

MODULE 3

Your Own Ancient Records

Module 3 · The Robe — the reclamation claim that survives mainly in the enemy's books, the tombs the dynasty carved beneath without knowing whose they were, the ancestors it acquired two centuries after the founding, and the burnt archive that made every claim unfalsifiable

The letter that cites the wrong library

In 358 the Sasanian king Shapur II sent an embassy to the Emperor Constantius II with a letter. Ammianus Marcellinus, a serving Roman officer on that frontier who reports the text, gives its terms; and Charles Duke Yonge's translation of 1862 is out of copyright, so the wording can stand as it is:

> *"I, Sapor, king of kings, partner of the stars, brother of the sun and moon, to Constantius Cæsar my brother send much greeting."*

And then, four paragraphs in, the claim this study exists to test:

> *"Even your own ancient records bear witness that my ancestors possessed all the country up to the Strymon and the frontier of Macedonia. And these lands it is fitting that I who (not to speak arrogantly) am superior to those ancient kings in magnificence, and in all eminent virtues, should now reclaim."*

Read that first clause again, because everything in this module runs through it. *Even your own ancient records bear witness.* The King of Kings of Iran, asserting the extent of his own ancestors' empire, offers as evidence the archive of the state he is writing to. Not a Persian chronicle. Not an inscription in Fars. Not a priestly tradition. The Greek and Roman books.

Whether Shapur said it or Ammianus composed it — and a Roman historian putting a claim in a Persian king's mouth would naturally source it to the literature his own readers knew — the sentence is diagnostic either way. If Shapur said it, he was appealing to the only archive that could support him. If Ammianus wrote it, he was recording what the claim sounded like to the people it was made to. On neither reading is there an Iranian document behind it.

And now notice the other claim in the same letter, three sentences later:

> *"And therefore it is a duty in me to recover Armenia and Mesopotamia, which were wrested from my ancestor by deliberate treachery."*

That one is precise. The ancestor is Narseh; the treachery is the settlement imposed after his defeat, some sixty years earlier; the territories are named and their loss is within the family's own living record. It requires no archive at all, and it is offered without one. Two claims, in one letter, at two completely different evidentiary standards. The claim a Sasanian could actually document reaches back three generations. The claim that reaches back six centuries is footnoted to the enemy's library.

That asymmetry is the module's spine, and the rest of it is an attempt to say honestly what stood in the space where an Iranian archive should have been.

Three Romans, one demand, and a trap

Shapur's letter is not the earliest report. Herodian, writing within a generation of the founding, has Ardashir informing Rome that the whole continent facing Europe belonged to him by inheritance, that Persian officers had governed it from Cyrus down to the Darius whom Alexander overthrew, and that he was therefore entitled to recover what the Persians had formerly held. That passage is the single most-cited piece of evidence for a Sasanian Achaemenid programme, and this study paraphrases rather than quotes it, because the standard English translation is in copyright and no adequate public-domain text has been located — a constraint declared here and at every later point of use.

Cassius Dio, a senator writing at the same time, gives the shorter version, and Earnest Cary's translation is public domain:

> *He accordingly became a source of fear to us; for he was encamped with a large army so as to threaten not only Mesopotamia but also Syria, and he boasted that he would win back everything that the ancient Persians had once held, as far as the Grecian Sea.*

So: Herodian around 240, Dio around 230, Ammianus reporting 358. Three Roman authors across more than a century, all reporting a Persian claim on the Achaemenid inheritance. That looks like corroboration, and this is exactly the moment the standing correction has to be applied, because the appearance of many sources agreeing is very often one interested framing, reproduced.

The trap is in the Landscape. In the year 35, Tacitus recorded envoys from the Arsacid king Artabanus demanding of Rome *the ancient boundaries of Persia and Macedonia*, with the stated intention of seizing the country once held by Cyrus and

afterwards by Alexander. That is the same demand, in the same terms, made by the dynasty the Sasanians destroyed, two centuries before Ardashir was born, and preserved in the same Latin literature that Herodian, Dio and Ammianus wrote inside.

Which means the Roman reports cannot establish what they are usually asked to establish. A Roman author who hears a Persian king demanding Syria has a ready-made template for what such a demand means, supplied by Herodotus, refreshed by Tacitus, and confirmed every time Rome fought anyone in the east. The template would produce these sentences whether or not any Persian ever had an Achaemenid in mind. And Shapur's own citation of *your own ancient records* is the template acknowledging itself.

None of this proves that no Sasanian ever thought about Cyrus. It establishes something narrower and more useful: **the Achaemenid claim survives in the archive of the party it was made against, in a form that party was primed to produce.** For evidence of what the Sasanians told themselves, we have to look at what they wrote at home.

What the founding robe actually said

Here the study runs into its declared constraint, and states it again: **the Sasanian royal inscriptions are paraphrased throughout and never quoted, because every edition and translation of them is modern and in copyright.** What follows is therefore reported content, not quotation, and a reader who wants the wording must go to the modern editions.

Ardashir's own titulature, on his coins and on the trilingual labels of his reliefs, describes him as the Mazda-worshipping lord Ardashir, King of Kings of Ērān, whose seed is from the gods, son of the lord Papak the king. Shapur's great inscription on the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt extends the realm to Ērān and Anērān, Iran and non-Iran, lists provinces, campaigns, court ranks and endowed fires — and traces the line no further back than Sasan and Papak.

Set that beside the Roman reports and the gap is total. The dynasty's own public self-description, in its own languages, on its own monuments, in the founding century, contains:

A claim of divine descent — *whose seed is from the gods* — which places the family's authority outside history altogether. A religious identification — *Mazda-worshipping* — which places it inside a cult. A father: Papak. And a realm: Ērān.

It contains no Cyrus, no Darius, no Achaemenid dynasty, and no claim of descent from any historical predecessor whatever. Giuseppe Gnoli suggested that a passage of Shapur's inscription referring to the *ancestors* of a great king might denote the

Achaemenids; the point has not been established and the specialist literature does not treat it as settled.

And the realm's name is itself the tell. *Ērānšahr* is not a recovered Achaemenid usage. Darius called himself a Persian, an Aryan of Aryan lineage, but no Achaemenid ever ruled a state called Ērānšahr; the term as the name of a polity begins with this dynasty. The word draws on the Avestan tradition's *airiia*, the Aryan lands, which in the Avesta denotes a portion of one climate among seven and which the Sasanians expanded to cover an empire. The founders were not restoring a name. They were coining one, out of religious literature, and asserting that it had always been the name of the place.

That is the anteriority claim of Module 2 again, and it is worth registering how much of the robe turns out to be built of it.

The tomb they carved beneath

Now the hardest fact in the module, and the one that keeps the question genuinely open.

Ardashir's investiture relief — the one where Ohrmazd hands him the ring while Artabanus lies under one horse and Ahriman under the other — is cut into the cliff at Naqsh-e Rustam. Directly above it are the rock-cut tombs of Achaemenid kings. Shapur's great inscription is carved on the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt, an Achaemenid tower standing at the foot of the same cliff. At Firuzabad, Ardashir's fire temple incorporates Achaemenid spolia. Wherever the early Sasanians put their most expensive and most permanent statements about themselves, they put them on Achaemenid ground.

That is not coincidence and nobody argues it is. The scholarly positions run from Ehsan Yarshater's, that there was no Achaemenid memory in the Sasanian period at all, through Touraj Daryaee's memory replacement and Rahim Shayegan's mediated memory, to Matthew Canepa's reading of the site choices as deliberate technologies of memory by which the new dynasty attached itself to a recognised older authority. Mary Boyce's suggestion that the Parthian minstrel tradition transmitted Achaemenid stories alongside Kayanian ones would, if right, mean the memory existed in oral form and was absorbed rather than lost. This study does not resolve that debate and should not pretend to.

What it can do is put one further fact beside the reliefs, and let the two sit together.

The Iranians, after the Achaemenid collapse, no longer remembered the name *Pārsa*. They called the site Sad Sotun, the Hundred-Columned, and Čehel Menār, the Forty-Columned; and the Iranian tradition attributed the monuments not to any king it could name from that dynasty but to Jamshid — the legendary world-sovereign of

the Pishdadian line, whose demons built him palaces of stone. The name it carries in Persian to this day is Takht-e Jamshid, the Throne of Jamshid. Later Muslim geographers describe the ruins and give the same attribution.

So the position is this. **The dynasty carved its title-deed beneath the tomb of ancestors it could not name.** It knew the place was charged. It did not know, or did not say, whose the tombs were. And the figure to whom the tradition assigned the whole complex — Jamshid — is, in that same tradition, the organiser of the social estates: the mythical author of exactly the fourfold division of society that Module 2 found the settlement asserting as immemorial.

The framework should take a rule from this, because it is generalisable and the corpus will meet it again. **Continuity of site is not continuity of memory.** A sacred landscape's sanctity outlives the story attached to it, because sanctity is maintained by use — by pilgrimage, by burial, by the reflex of treating certain ground as the place where serious things are said — while history is maintained only by records, and records are the first thing a conquest destroys. What a later dynasty inherits, therefore, is typically a *place without persons*: a monument whose authority is evident and whose attribution is vacant. And a monument in that condition is not a memory. It is a resource. Whoever supplies the missing name owns what the stones imply.

The Sasanians supplied Jamshid, and later the Kayanians, and the Romans supplied Cyrus, and each supply served the party making it.

The ancestors they acquired in the fifth century

The strongest single piece of evidence in this module is a dating, and it is not usually put to this use.

If the Sasanian robe had been built on a claim of ancient Iranian ancestry, that claim should be present at the founding, when the dynasty most needed legitimation. It is not. The third-century robe, as we have just seen, is theological: Mazda-worship, divine seed, Ērān. There is no Kayanian claim on Ardashir's coins, none in Shapur's inscription, and no Sasanian king of the founding centuries bears a Kayanian name.

That changes, and it changes late, and the date is documented. Under Yazdegerd I, at the turn of the fifth century, a Kayanian element appears as a title. Then Kayanian names that had never been used by this dynasty before — Kawād, Kāwūs, Zāmāsp, Xusrō — become the norm for kings and princes. The title *kay* itself, the Young Avestan *kauui-* borne by the mythical kings of Iran, is adopted by Yazdegerd II and runs on the coinage until Kawad I, after which Khosrow I drops both it and *šāhān šāh* in favour of his bare name.

Two hundred years after the founding, the dynasty acquired a legendary ancestry it had not previously claimed, wore it for roughly a century, and then put it down.

And there is a reason on the record for the timing. The fifth century is when Hunnic peoples arrived on the north-eastern frontier and became the empire's principal military problem — the century in which a Sasanian king, Peroz, would die fighting them. The mobilisation of the empire's resources eastward brought with it a sustained reception of eastern Iranian mytho-epic tradition, and that tradition supplied, ready-made, a story about the Kayanian kings of Iran fighting the Turanians of the east. A dynasty at war on the eastern frontier reached for the epic in which the eastern frontier is the enemy, and put its kings' names into it.

This is, so far as this collection has yet found, the cleanest available demonstration of a proposition the framework has held in weaker form. **A robe's historical content is not inherited by memory. It is selected by present need, and the selector is usually the current enemy.** Fighting Rome in the third century, the Sasanians offered Rome a claim in Roman terms and told themselves a theological story. Fighting Huns in the fifth, they became Kayanians. The ancestors changed because the frontier changed.

It also forces a correction back onto Module 1. The *Kārnāmag*, which frames Ardashir's whole rise around the Glory of the Kayanians and has women on the road hail him as *Ardashir the Kai*, is a late Sasanian composition. Its Kayanian dressing of the founder is therefore not third-century evidence at all: it is the fifth-century robe painted back onto the founding, three hundred years after the fact, by the priesthood that had by then adopted it. Module 1 held the text loosely for other reasons. This is the specific reason.

The archive that had to be burnt

One element of the robe is present from the beginning, and it is the one that makes all the rest possible.

The Letter of Tansar, in James Darmesteter's public-domain French, has the chief priest of the new order answering a king who has questioned the legitimacy of the whole religious restoration:

> *« Tu sais qu'Alexandre avait brûlé nos livres de lois religieuses, écrits sur douze mille peaux de bœufs : la masse des légendes, des traditions, des lois et des ordonnances furent complètement oubliées... Il est donc péremptoirement nécessaire qu'un homme sage et vertueux rétablisse la religion. Or, as-tu jamais vu un homme ou entendu parler d'un homme plus digne que le Shâhinshâh de se mettre à la tête de cette entreprise ? »*

You know that Alexander burned our books of religious law, written on twelve thousand ox-hides; the mass of the legends, the traditions, the laws and the ordinances were completely forgotten. It is therefore absolutely necessary that a wise and virtuous man should re-establish the religion. And have you ever seen, or heard tell of, a man worthier than the King of Kings to put himself at the head of that enterprise?

Follow the logic, because it is not an excuse but an argument, and a strong one. The premise is the destruction of the record. The conclusion is the authority of the restorer. The destruction does not weaken the claim; **the destruction is what licenses the claim**, because in the absence of the documents somebody must decide what the law was, and the man best placed to decide is the man with the empire. Module 2 named this structure the anteriority claim and noted that its evidence is always located beyond the reach of documents. Here we can watch it stated openly, as a syllogism, by the party it benefits.

The same story, in the same tradition, is told with the archive's address attached. The *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag* — whose introductory chapters are dated by the specialist literature to after the Arab conquest, six centuries later, so that this is a ninth- or tenth-century text and will be treated as one — has Alexander come from Egypt into Iran with cruelty and war, kill the ruler, destroy the capital, and burn the Avesta and Zand, which had been written on prepared ox-hides in gold ink and deposited in the archives at Stakhar Pāpakān.

Stakhar Pāpakān. Istakhr of Papak. The lost national archive is placed in the founder's father's town, at the site of the family's hereditary fire.

That detail is not evidence about the fourth century BC. It is evidence about how the story was built, and about who benefited from where it was set. And it should be held together with the dating: a text compiled under Islamic rule by a shrinking community, telling of a foreign conqueror who destroyed the books and killed the priests, is very probably talking about the Arabs while naming Alexander. The catastrophe is real in some form — Alexander did burn Persepolis, and Diodorus reports it — but the version we have has been through at least one further catastrophe since, and carries its marks.

Whom the robe was cut for

Now apply the test the Landscape set. The framework's colonial cases found a robe cut for the metropole rather than for the conquered, because it was the metropole's belief that funded and manned the conquest. The Landscape predicted the same shape here, for a different reason: that this dynasty's robe would face its own coordinating

class and its enemy rather than the population that paid for it. Module 3 can now check it against the artefacts.

Where the robe is physically located: on cliffs in Fars, at Naqsh-e Rustam, Naqsh-e Rajab, Firuzabad — the dynastic homeland, on the roads and at the sacred sites, hundreds of kilometres from the alluvium that produced the revenue.

What languages it is in: Middle Persian and Parthian — the languages of the two aristocracies the dynasty had to hold together — and Greek. Not Aramaic, which is what the taxpayers of Āsōristān actually spoke.

What it asserts: divine seed, Mazda-worship, the King of Kings of Ērān. Every one of those propositions is meaningful to a Zoroastrian aristocrat and meaningless or offensive to a Babylonian Jew or an Aramaean Christian, who between them made up much of the population of the empire's richest province.

Who the Greek is for: the only party in the world who read Greek and mattered to Ardashir was Rome. The trilingual label is a diplomatic document as much as a religious one.

So the robe faced three audiences — the Iranian nobility whose cavalry made the king, the priesthood that had been bought in Module 2, and the enemy across the Euphrates — and it did not face the taxpayer at all. The framework's sharpest diagnostic applies: force never pays for what it does not need, and what Ardashir paid for was cliffs in Fars and Greek captions. He did not commission a single thing designed to make an Aramaic-speaking cultivator of the Sawad believe that the House of Sasan ruled by right.

Which raises the question of what the alluvium got instead, and the answer is the subject of Modules 7 and 9. An order that does not attempt to persuade a population has to watch it.

Reading the robe against the framework

The principal contribution. The Achaemenid study established that a defeated order's dimensions in the record are a function of the victor's need. This module extends the rule from the defeated to the *claimed*: **the antiquity a regime asserts is selected by present circumstance, and the selector is usually its current enemy.** The Sasanians' third-century robe, in their own languages on their own monuments, contains no historical ancestry at all — only divine seed, Mazda-worship, and a newly coined name for the realm. The Achaemenid claim appears almost exclusively in Roman sources, addressed to Rome, in terms a Roman audience already possessed, and Shapur II's letter sources it explicitly to the Roman archive. The Kayanian claim appears in the fifth century, when Hunnic war on the eastern frontier made an eastern

epic of Iran against Turan operationally useful, and it is dropped again within a century. Three different pasts, each arriving when it was wanted. The diagnostic to carry into other cases: **when a regime's claimed ancestors change, look at the frontier, not the archive.**

A second contribution, narrower but exportable. The corpus should not treat a regime's reuse of a predecessor's monuments as evidence that it remembered the predecessor. **Continuity of site is not continuity of memory.** Sanctity is maintained by use and survives the loss of the story; history is maintained by records and does not. What a later order inherits is characteristically a place without persons — an evidently authoritative monument with a vacant attribution — and such a monument is not a memory but a resource, whose implied authority accrues to whoever supplies the missing name. The Sasanians carved their investiture beneath Achaemenid tombs and assigned the whole landscape to Jamshid, the mythical organiser of the very social estates their settlement was asserting as immemorial.

A confirmation of Module 2's fiction. The anteriority claim is not a weak argument dressed up. It is a syllogism whose premise is the destruction of the evidence, and Tansar states it in that form: the books were burnt, everything was forgotten, therefore a wise man must re-establish the religion, and who is worthier than the King of Kings? **A restoration claim is strongest precisely where the record is weakest**, which inverts the normal behaviour of a title, and explains why the burning of the archive is told and retold by the people whose authority depends on it.

A confirmation of the Landscape's reversed robe. Cut for the aristocracy, the priesthood and Rome; not cut for the population that paid. The physical location, the languages and the content all point the same way.

And the strongest counter-position, stated fully. The case against everything above is real and should not be softened. The early Sasanians chose Achaemenid ground for their most permanent statements — the cliff at Naqsh-e Rustam, the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt, Achaemenid stone at Firuzabad — and that is a great deal of coincidence for a dynasty said to know nothing. They came from the same province as the Achaemenids, in a landscape saturated with their monuments, some bearing legible inscriptions. Gnoli read a passage of Shapur's inscription as pointing to Achaemenid ancestors. Boyce argued that the Parthian minstrel tradition carried Achaemenid material. Canepa's case that the site choices were deliberate acts of association is not answered by pointing out that the tradition later called the place Jamshid's throne.

The answer this module offers is not that the Sasanians knew nothing, but that what they had was not of the kind the argument requires. To claim descent from a dynasty you need names, an order, and a link to yourself; what the evidence supports is a

landscape recognised as royal and ancient, with no dynasty attached, whose grandeur was available to anyone standing under it. That is enough to explain the site choices completely. It is not enough to build a genealogy, and — the decisive point — no Sasanian ever built one. When they finally did claim ancestors, in the fifth century, the ancestors they chose were not the men in the tombs. They were figures out of the Avesta, useful against the Huns.

And the discipline, restated, because this module has spent its length taking a claim apart. Naming a robe as built is not calling it a lie, and this collection does not slide from *this was constructed* to *so it does not count*. The Kayanian past became, over generations, entirely real to the people who held it — real enough that a thousand years later Ferdowsi would compose the Iranian national epic out of it and Iran would keep it as its own history, which by then it was. That the origin was built does not make the belief false; it makes it a thing that was built and then became true. What the module establishes is only when it was built, and by whom, and against which enemy.

A note on sources. **Quoted exactly, from public-domain sources:** Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* 17.5.3–6, on Shapur II's letter to Constantius — the salutation, the appeal to Roman ancient records for the Strymon and the frontier of Macedonia, and the demand for Armenia and Mesopotamia wrested from his ancestor — in Charles Duke Yonge's translation (Bohn's Classical Library, London, 1862), taken from the Project Gutenberg text of that edition. Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 80.4, on Ardashir's boast of winning back everything the ancient Persians held as far as the Grecian Sea, in Earnest Cary's Loeb translation (1914–25), which is public domain. Tacitus, *Annals* 6.31, on the envoys of Artabanus, in Church and Brodribb, as established in the Landscape. The Letter of Tansar on the twelve thousand ox-hides and the necessity of a restorer, in James Darmesteter's French (*Le Zend-Avesta*, vol. III, Annales du Musée Guimet 24, Paris, 1893).

Paraphrased and not quoted, with the constraint declared: Herodian 6.2.2, the single most-cited text for a Sasanian Achaemenid programme, because the standard English translation (Echols, 1961) is in copyright and no adequate public-domain English text has been located; this is a real weakness in the module and it is stated rather than concealed. All Sasanian royal inscriptions and coin legends — Ardashir's titulature, Shapur's inscription at the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt and its genealogy, the *kay* title on the fifth-century coinage — because every edition and translation of them is modern and in copyright. The *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag*'s account of Alexander and the archive at Stakhar Pāpakān is summarised rather than quoted: the 1872 translation by Haug and West is public domain, but the digital text available to this study has had its

spelling and punctuation normalised and has not been collated here against the printed edition, so the module reports its substance and does not present its wording as exact.

Paraphrased from modern scholarship, briefly and with credit: Encyclopaedia Iranica on Sasanian kingship (the fifth-century shift in titulature, the adoption of *kay* under Yazdegerd II, its disappearance under Khosrow I, and the suggested connection with Hunnic war in the east and the reception of eastern mytho-epic tradition) and on Persepolis (the loss of the name *Pārsa*, the appellations Sad Sotun and Čehel Menār, and the attribution of the monuments to Jamshid, organiser of the social estates); Ehsan Yarshater, A. Sh. Shahbazi, Josef Wiesehöfer, Touraj Daryaee, Rahim Shayegan and Matthew Canepa for the range of positions on Achaemenid memory, and Giuseppe Gnoli for the reading of Shapur's *ancestors*; Mary Boyce on the Parthian minstrel tradition and on the character and date of the *Kārnāmag*; and the specialist dating of the *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag*'s introductory chapters to after the Arab conquest.

This module's own weak links. The whole argument would be stronger with Herodian in front of the reader, and the copyright constraint means it is not; a reader who consults the modern translation should weigh that passage for himself. The negative claim — that no Sasanian source of the founding centuries asserts Achaemenid descent — is an argument from absence across a badly preserved corpus, and one securely read inscription would overturn it. Gnoli's reading of Shapur's *ancestors* is the live possibility and is not dismissed here, only noted as unproven. The connection between the Hunnic wars and the adoption of Kayanian titulature is a scholarly hypothesis about causation, well founded in the chronology but not demonstrable from any document that says so; the *dating* is secure and the *explanation* is not, and the module's contribution survives even if the explanation fails, because a robe acquired two centuries after the founding is still not an inherited memory. And this module reads the *Kārnāmag*'s Kayanian framing as late, which follows from the text's own dating but which a scholar who dates the composition earlier would resist.

MODULE 4

Fourteen Years and Three Months

Module 4 · Formation — a calendar in which no day could be named without naming a god, a priesthood that could not recruit, the one instrument built to cross the language line and the three years it took to destroy it, and the four centuries in which the empire's richest province had its children formed by somebody else

What is being measured here

Formation is not schooling and it is not propaganda. It is the installation of a person's picture of the world before he is old enough to screen what is being installed: who his natural leaders are, whose word is taken without checking, which court is his court, what is obvious, what is unthinkable. It happens in the household and in the units by which ordinary life is counted, and by the time anyone is capable of examining it, it is not a set of opinions he holds but the equipment he would have to use to examine anything at all.

The axiom that governs the module is that **there is no unformed person.** To be unformed is to be feral. A child raised in any human society arrives at adulthood with a complete picture of the world; the only question is whose. It follows that a conqueror does not face a choice between forming the conquered and leaving them neutral. He faces a choice between forming them and leaving the formation already running in possession of the field.

The distinction from Module 3 is worth stating exactly, because the two modules can look similar and are not. A robe is an argument, made to adults, who can weigh it, and it therefore has to be plausible to people who remember things. Formation is not argued at all. It is installed in people who cannot yet weigh anything, and its success is measured not by assent but by the absence of the question.

This module therefore asks four things of the Sasanian order. What formed the Iranian child. What the crown built, or failed to build, for everyone else. Who occupied the field it left. And what the bill was.

A year in which no day could be named without naming a god

Begin with the strongest instrument in the case, which is not a doctrine and not a school. It is the calendar.

The Zoroastrian year that became official under the Sasanians ran twelve months of thirty days, with five additional days at the end named after the Gathas, the ancient hymns — three hundred and sixty-five in all. Every month bore the name of a divinity. And so did every day of every month: four days of each month to Ohrmazd; seven named for the Amesha Spentas; the rest for fire, the waters, the sun, the moon, Tir, the soul of the ox, Mihr, Srosh, Rashn, the Fravashis, Wahram, Ram and the wind, together with Den, Ard and Ashtad. Where the name of the day coincided with the name of the month, there was a feast: Mihragan on the day Mihr in the month Mihr, and Tiragan, and Adargan, and the rest. The feasts were not decreed on top of the calendar; they fell out of the naming scheme automatically.

Now think about what that does to a child, and think about it as engineering rather than as piety.

An Iranian child could not learn to say what day it was without naming a god. Not could not without impiety — could not at all, because there was no other vocabulary in which the question had an answer. He did not have to be persuaded that Mihr existed. Mihr was the sixteenth of the month. By the time he could be told about religion, the religion was already the container in which telling happened.

The same architecture runs down through the smaller units. The day was divided into five *gāh*, five watches, each with its own prayer. The year was punctuated by the six seasonal *gahanbars*. The sacred cord was untied and retied at each of the daily prayers, which makes the observance not an annual event or a weekly one but a thing done with the hands five times between waking and sleeping. And the purity law divided not time but substance: what may touch water, what may touch fire, who must stand how many paces from what, how the dead are to be treated and by whom.

That last is worth dwelling on because it shows the difference between a rule and a formation. A rule against burying the dead is something a person can break. A child raised under the corpse-pollution law does not decide against burial; the thought of putting a corpse into the earth arrives already accompanied by the sensation of contamination, in the same way that the thought of eating from a lavatory floor arrives to a modern reader. That is what "unthinkable" means in the framework's sense. It is not a strong prohibition. It is a category that was closed before the person got there.

Two honest qualifications, because this instrument is powerful enough that overstating it would be easy.

The first is that the scheme was not a Sasanian invention. The naming of the days and months after divinities is considerably older — attested in Parthian-era documents from Nisa, and probably instituted under the Achaemenids. What the Sasanian tradition attributes to Ardashir is the reform to a 365-day year with the five Gatha days

added, and even that attribution is transmitted rather than documented. So the calendar is itself the recursion in action: a former order's formation instrument that had wholly taken, inherited by a new dynasty and made official. The Sasanians did not build this. They found it running and stepped into it, which is the cheapest thing on the menu and, this module will argue, also the reason they never learned how to build one.

The second qualification is that the reform met resistance. The addition of the five days threw the festivals out of alignment, produced feasts with two dates, and required a further adjustment under Hormizd I. That is a nuisance for the historian and a gift for the argument, because **people do not object to a change in something they do not live inside.** The friction is the evidence that the calendar was not a priestly abstraction but the actual furniture of ordinary time.

The girdle, and why it is not the formation

The Pahlavi books fix the moment at which a Zoroastrian becomes answerable. The *Šāyast lā-Šāyast*, in E. W. West's public-domain translation for the *Sacred Books of the East*, gives the rule:

> *The rule is this, as revealed in the Duwasrud Nask, where a day in the year is indicated, that the sacred thread-girdle of every one who shall be one day more than fourteen years and three months old is to be tied on.*

The *Sad Dar*, a much later Persian text and not scripture, in West's translation, records the consequence of failure:

> *The tenth subject is this, that it is incumbent on all those of the good religion, women and men, who attain the age of fifteen years, to wear the sacred thread-girdle... And, in former days, if any one became completely fifteen years of age, and did not wear the kusti, then that person was ostracized.*

Fourteen years and three months — fourteen years out of the womb plus the nine months in it — is the date on which the community's claim on a person becomes formal. But it is not the date on which formation happens, and reading it as an initiation into belief would get the mechanism exactly backwards. Nothing is taught at fourteen. What happens at fourteen is **ratification**: the certification of a picture of the world that was installed a decade earlier, by parents who wore the same cord and untied it five times a day, in a house governed by purity rules, inside a calendar that named a divinity every morning.

This is the general shape of the thing and it is worth having as a diagnostic. **An order's initiation rite marks not the beginning of formation but its completion**, and the age of the rite is therefore a measure of how long the order thinks the installation takes — not of when it starts.

What the crown did not build

Now the question that decides the module.

The Sasanian settlement, as Module 2 established, bought a priesthood: gave it a doctrinal monopoly, gave it the courts, and took its sanction in return. That priesthood ran, on the plateau and among Iranians, the most complete formation apparatus this collection has yet examined. The obvious next question is what it ran in Āsōristān, in the Sawad, among the Aramaic-speaking cultivators and townsmen who produced the empire's revenue and who were, by the reckoning of the sources, mostly Christian or Jewish.

The answer is: nothing.

There were no Zoroastrian schools for Aramaean children. There was no programme of household conversion, no catechism translated into Syriac for the villages, no institution whose business was forming the young of the fiscal heartland into subjects of the Mazdean order. And the absence is not an accident of the record. It has two structural causes, and both of them matter to the framework.

The first is that the formation apparatus could not recruit. The Zoroastrian priesthood was a hereditary class, and it maintained itself as a closed one — Encyclopaedia Iranica's account of Kirdir's programme describes precisely that, a hereditary clergy ensuring its perpetuation as a closed social class through next-of-kin marriage. A priesthood that reproduces by descent and by kin marriage cannot expand its personnel to cover a population it did not start with. Whatever the crown might have wished, the instrument physically could not be scaled to the alluvium, because the men who would have had to do the work could only be born, not made.

The second is that a formed Aramaean would have been a category error. The whole scheme rested on the distinction between *ēr* and *anēr*, Iranian and non-Iranian: it is in the royal title, King of Kings of Ērān and Anērān; it is in the estate doctrine of Module 2, which allocated rank and legal standing by birth into one of four divisions; and it is in the name of the realm that Module 3 found the founders coining. To take a Babylonian child, form him as a Mazda-worshipper, tie the girdle on him at fourteen years and three months and admit him to the community would have been to make him *ēr*. And that is the same trade the framework has already seen refused in a very different empire.

Here the corpus's colonial case is the right comparison, and the comparison is instructive precisely because the mechanism is *not* the same. In British Kenya, formation was withheld as **policy**: forming Kenyans as Englishmen would have created a claim to admission and to rights, so the administration formed a small class of clerks and administrators and left the rest alone. In Sasanian Iran, formation was withheld by **constitution**: the apparatus was a hereditary caste that could not take outsiders in, and the social scheme it served was built on a distinction that admission would have dissolved.

The framework should therefore state its proposition at the right level of generality, because the Kenya case alone would leave it looking like a matter of colonial intent. **The field is not left open by intention but by capacity.** The question to put to any conquering order is not whether it wanted to form the conquered but whether its formation apparatus was capable of taking them — and the sharpest single diagnostic is: **does the order's clergy recruit from outside itself?** A closed priesthood is a guarantee of withheld formation whatever the crown intends, and an order that has bought a closed priesthood has, in that act, decided the confessional future of every province it does not already hold.

And one further thing has to be said, because the record is full of activity that can be mistaken for formation and is not. Kirdir's inscriptions — paraphrased here and not quoted, under the constraint this study declared at the outset, because all editions of them are modern — record a programme of striking at Jews, Buddhists, Brahmins, Nazoreans, Christians and Manichaeans, and of bringing Iranians who had held the religion of the *dēvs* over to the religion of the *yazads*. Read structurally, that is enforcement inside the Iranian population and persecution outside it. **Persecution is not formation and cannot substitute for it.** It addresses adults, who already have a picture of the world; it presupposes the rival formation rather than displacing it; and by making a community's boundary sharper and its dead into martyrs, it supplies that community with formation material of its own. The martyr-acts of the Church of the East are, among other things, texts for teaching children who they are.

Who filled the field

They were not left unformed. Nobody ever is.

The Jews. The timing, as the Landscape noted, is almost too neat: Rav returned from Palestine to Babylonia in 219, five years before Hormozdgan, and founded the academy at Sura, conventionally dated from about 225, while Samuel headed Nehardea. Pumbedita followed. Alongside the academies ran the elementary institution, and the rabbinic tradition preserves its charter — the enactment attributed

to Joshua ben Gamla, that teachers of children be appointed in every province and every town and children brought to them at six or seven, without which, the passage says, the Torah would have been forgotten in Israel. That passage is not in Rodkinson's abridged English and is therefore paraphrased here rather than quoted, which is a concrete instance of the limitation this study flagged in Module 2.

Six or seven. Set that beside fourteen years and three months and the asymmetry is the whole module. The Zoroastrian date is a ratification; the Jewish one is an acquisition. One community was certifying children it already had; the other was taking them at the age when the picture of the world goes in.

And the Sasanian crown's relation to this was not hostility but *recognition*. Module 2 noted the rulings attributed to Samuel — the law of the kingdom is law — accepting the state's law of land and its land tax while declining its poll tax; the exilarch was an acknowledged office with standing at court. The bargain is perfectly legible in framework terms and perfectly rational for both sides. The crown obtained revenue, order and a responsible interlocutor. The community retained its courts, its calendar, its language and its children. Nobody had to be deceived and nobody had to be persuaded. The crown simply did not want the thing it was giving away, because it had no use for the belief of people it did not intend to admit.

The Christians. By the fifth century the Church of the East was an organised body with a catholicos at Seleucia-Ctesiphon, and its formation apparatus was formidable. The School of Nisibis — refounded after the closure of the School of Edessa in 489 drove its teachers and students east across the frontier — had written statutes, drafted in 496 and revised in 590 and 602, closer in character to a monastic rule than to a modern syllabus. It had a rector and a master with a council responsible for discipline and finance; two principal professors, the Interpreter, who expounded scripture on Theodore of Mopsuestia's commentaries, and the Master of the Lessons; a three-year course; students living in community, seated in a common hall at desks ranked by standing; instruction given free; and elementary reading taught alongside exegesis and dialectic. Abraham de Bet Rabban, rector for some sixty years, is credited with over a thousand students. Its graduates filled the bishoprics of the Persian church.

Put the sentence plainly, because it is the module's most concrete finding. **The most effective formation institution operating on Sasanian soil was a Christian seminary, run by refugees the Roman emperor had expelled, training the leadership of a church whose co-religionists sat across the frontier — and the Sasanian crown had nothing of the kind for anybody outside the priestly caste.** The statutes even bother to forbid students from hiring themselves out as guides to

travellers crossing the frontier, to avoid any imputation of spying: an institution self-aware enough to police the very suspicion its position invited.

The instrument they had, and the three years it took

There was one moment when the empire held a technology that could have formed both halves of its population, and the module has to handle it carefully, because the sources permit a description of the position and do not permit an account of anyone's motives.

Mani was born around 216 near Ctesiphon, into an Iranian family — his father possibly of Arsacid stock — and raised from about the age of four in the Elkasaite religious community of the alluvium. He began preaching at twenty-four; from 241, under Shapur I, he taught at the Sasanian court. Seven of his major works were composed in Syriac, the language of the alluvium; the eighth, the *Šābuhragān*, was written in Middle Persian and dedicated to Shapur, and it is in that Iranian version that Ohrmazd and Ahriman appear, while the Syriac originals use Aramaic terms throughout. Under Shapur I and his successor Hormizd I, Mani had permission to travel and preach across the empire.

Consider what that is, structurally, independent of anything anyone believed. It is a formation technology built to be **translated** — a body of scripture composed separately for different populations in their own languages, with the doctrine rendered into each one's existing vocabulary of divinity. That is exactly the capability the Zoroastrian apparatus structurally lacked, and it is exactly the capability an empire whose army spoke Persian and whose revenue spoke Aramaic would have needed to form its own population.

What happened is a matter of record. On Shapur's death, Hormizd reigned about a year. Bahram I summoned Mani to court at Gundeshapur, had him interrogated, and imprisoned him; he died in confinement, on 2 March 274 or 26 February 277 depending on the reckoning, and the Manichaean sources attribute the outcome to Kirdir. Persecution of the church followed, and its leader Sisinnios was killed under Bahram II. Manichaeism went on to flourish from North Africa to China and was rendered insignificant in the Iranian heartland.

This study will not guess at Shapur's reasons. The sources do not say whether he was hedging, or interested, or displaying an alternative supplier to keep the priesthood honest, and the temptation to supply a motive is exactly the temptation the method exists to resist. What the position permits saying is narrower and firmer. A king who had granted one priesthood a monopoly on doctrine and the courts, as Ardashir's settlement did, had thereby made himself a single-supplier customer; and a single-

supplier customer who acquires a second supplier has improved his position whether or not he ever intends to switch. That is a description of the seat, not of the man in it.

And what the sequence shows is the price of Module 2's bargain, arriving on schedule. Within three years of the patron's death, the alternative supplier was dead and the monopolist had demonstrated that it could collect. **A settlement that grants one supplier exclusive doctrinal authority does not merely determine what the order believes; it forecloses the order's ability to acquire a formation instrument later.** Module 2's purchase and Module 4's gap are the same fact, read at two dates fifty years apart.

The empire tried one universal formation instrument, for one reign, and destroyed it. After that there was no candidate.

The bill, held as a prediction

By the end, the arrangement had run for four centuries. In the province the tradition called the heart of Ērānšahr, the children of the people who paid for the empire had been formed, generation after generation, in Aramaic, on calendars that were not the king's, by institutions the crown recognised but did not staff — brought to a teacher at six or seven, or taught by an Interpreter working from Theodore of Mopsuestia. Whose word such a person took without checking, and which court he regarded as his own, had been settled long before he was old enough to have an opinion about the King of Kings, and the answer was the exilarch, the catholicos, the rabbi, the bishop.

Whether that mattered when the Arabs came is Module 10's question and Module 11's, and this module will not annex their findings. What it can do is register the prediction plainly so that it can be tested rather than assumed: **if the collapse modules find the alluvium indifferent to the fall of the order that taxed it, the indifference was manufactured here, not in the seventh century.**

And the symmetrical honesty is required too, because the finding is not that the Sasanian formation was weak. It was extraordinarily strong where it ran. The Zoroastrian formation on the plateau survived the conquest, survived centuries of Islamic rule, survived migration to India, and is not extinct now. The withholding did not dilute what the crown had. It simply meant that what the crown had covered one part of its empire, and that the rest of it belonged, in the only sense that finally counts, to somebody else.

Reading formation against the framework

The first contribution: units of measure, not messages. This case supplies the clearest instrument the corpus has yet examined, and it is not a doctrine, a text, a school or a sermon. It is a calendar in which every day of every month bore a divinity's name, a day divided into five watches each with its prayer, a girdle untied and retied five times between waking and sleeping, and a purity law that partitioned substances. None of that argues anything. **A message can be weighed and rejected; a unit of measure is the thing in which rejection would have to be counted.** The diagnostic to carry into other cases is therefore not *what was the population told* but **what could a child not do without using the order's categories** — name a day, name an hour, name a season, handle water, handle a corpse, dress in the morning. Where the answer is "nothing," formation is running deep whatever anyone professes; where the answer is "most things," it is shallow however loud the professions.

The second contribution, and it corrects the corpus's existing reading. The collection's colonial case established that a conqueror may withhold formation from the majority because forming them would mean admitting them, and that the field is then held by the formation already running. That finding is sound and this module confirms its consequence exactly. But taken alone it makes the withholding look like a decision, and this case shows it need not be. The Sasanian crown did not deliberate about whether to form the Aramaeans of the Sawad. Its formation apparatus was a hereditary caste that reproduced by descent and by next-of-kin marriage and could not take outsiders in at all; and the social order it served was built on the *ēr/anēr* distinction that admission would have dissolved. The correct statement is therefore: **the field is left open by capacity, not by intention.** Ask of a conquering order not whether it wished to form the conquered but whether its apparatus was constitutionally able to. The single sharpest test is **whether the order's clergy recruits from outside itself**, because a closed priesthood settles the confessional future of every province the conqueror does not already hold, and settles it on the first day, regardless of what any king later decides he wants.

Two consequences, following from those and not counted as separate findings. Persecution is not formation and cannot stand in for it: it addresses adults who are already formed, presupposes the rival apparatus rather than displacing it, and by sharpening a community's boundary and supplying it with martyrs, it manufactures that community's own teaching material. And a doctrinal monopoly granted at the settlement forecloses the order's later ability to acquire a formation instrument, which is why the one translatable technology the empire ever held — a scripture written

separately in Syriac and in Middle Persian for the two halves of the population — lasted exactly as long as the king who protected it.

The discipline, restated, because this module has been describing the machinery of belief. Naming formation as machinery is not calling the belief false, and this collection does not slide from *this was installed* to *so it does not count*. The Iranian who tied his girdle at the third watch was not the victim of a trick; he was a person whose world had a shape, as every person's world has a shape, and the shape was as real to him as the ground. The same is true of the Babylonian child brought to a teacher at six. What the module establishes is only who owned the installation, in which province, and what it cost an empire to own it in one place and not the other.

A note on sources. **Quoted exactly, from public-domain sources:** the *Šāyast lā-Šāyast* on the tying of the sacred thread-girdle at one day more than fourteen years and three months, and the *Sad Dar*, chapter 10, on the obligation at fifteen and the ostracism of those who failed it, both in E. W. West's translations for the *Sacred Books of the East* (Pahlavi Texts, Oxford). Readers should note two things about these: the digital text of the *Šāyast lā-Šāyast* used here carries a modern editorial gloss identifying the girdle as the *kusti*, which is not part of West's sentence and has been removed from the quotation above; and the *Sad Dar* is a late Persian composition, not scripture, valuable as a record of practice rather than as evidence for the third century.

Paraphrased and not quoted, with the constraint declared: all Sasanian royal and priestly inscriptions, including Kirdir's, from which this module takes the programme of striking at the non-Zoroastrian communities and of bringing Iranians from the religion of the *dēvs* to that of the *yazads*; every edition and translation of these is modern and in copyright, and this constraint governs the whole study. The rabbinic enactment attributed to Joshua ben Gamla concerning teachers of children in every town and their admission at six or seven is paraphrased rather than quoted, because it does not appear in Michael Rodkinson's abridged public-domain English of Baba Bathra, whose own synopsis lists it; the standard reference for it is Bava Batra 21a and a reader who wants the wording must go to a modern translation. This is a direct instance of the source limitation declared in Module 2, and it recurs.

Paraphrased from modern scholarship, briefly and with credit: Encyclopaedia Iranica on conversion to and from Zoroastrianism (the absence of evidence for Jewish conversion under the Sasanians; the characterisation of the Zoroastrian clergy as a hereditary class perpetuating itself as a closed one through next-of-kin marriage; and the contrast drawn there between Zoroastrianism and the universalist religions propagated by missionary activity), on the historical review of Zoroastrianism (Kirdir's list of communities attacked, and his role in Mani's death as reported in Manichaean

sources), and on Nisibis (the statutes and the prohibition on students acting as paid guides across the frontier); the standard reference literature on the School of Nisibis for its statutes of 496, 590 and 602, its officers, its three-year free course, its communal residence and its student numbers under Abraham de Bet Rabban; and the standard literature on Mani for his birth near Ctesiphon around 216, his Elkasaite upbringing, the seven Syriac works and the Middle Persian *Šābuhragān* dedicated to Shapur I, his licence to preach under Shapur I and Hormizd I, and his death at Gundeshapur under Bahram I.

Dates and figures, with their disputes attached. Mani's death is given as 2 March 274 or 26 February 277 depending on the source and the reckoning, and the module gives both. Sisinnios's death is placed variously in 286 and 291. The School of Edessa's closure is 489 and Narsai's move to Nisibis is placed around 471, before it; the first statutes are dated 496. Sura's foundation is conventionally about 225 and Rav's return to Babylonia 219. The 365-day calendar with five Gatha days is attributed by the tradition to Ardashir I with a subsequent adjustment under Hormizd I; the attribution is transmitted rather than documented and the day- and month-naming scheme itself is substantially older, attested in Parthian-period material from Nisa and probably instituted in Achaemenid times.

This module's own weak links, stated where they would embarrass the argument. We have almost no direct evidence of how ordinary Iranian children were actually raised. The Pahlavi books are priestly, prescriptive and late, and a prescriptive text records what its authors thought should happen, not what did; the reconstruction of household formation offered here is an inference from the ritual apparatus and should be read as one. Kirdir's account of his own activities is a self-report by a man being scored on exactly the achievements he lists, and his numbers and his successes should be discounted accordingly — though the *shape* of his programme, enforcement inward and attack outward, is not the sort of thing he would have had reason to misrepresent. The central claim that the crown built no formation instrument for the alluvium is an argument from absence across a poorly preserved record; a single securely attested Zoroastrian institution for teaching Aramaean children would weaken it considerably, and none has been found here. The demographic picture of the alluvium as predominantly Christian and Jewish rests on the reference literature's summary and cannot be quantified. And the reading of Manichaeism as a translatable formation technology is this module's own structural interpretation rather than a claim any source makes; what the sources establish is the fact of the separate Syriac and Middle Persian scriptures, and the interpretation is offered as such.

MODULE 5

Neither Pay nor Gratuity

Module 5 · The Cost Column — why the common man complied: a door shut by law and by irrigation, a share of the crop assessed on the spot by a man with discretion, a head tax that defined the stratum that paid it, a law that condemned a man's relations for his crime, and the water that was the whole of the benefit side

What is being measured, and about whom

This module is not about the hierarchy. It is about the peasant on irrigated land in the Sawad and the villager on the plateau, the weaver and the smith in a walled town, the man deported from Antioch and settled in Khuzestan, the slave, and the tenant of a great house. It asks the only question that matters about any of them: why comply?

The framework's answer has four terms and they have to be weighed together rather than separately. What does compliance cost, against what benefit does it return? Is there a credible power that will actually impose the cost of refusal, or is the threat notional? What does the man's own community do to him if he steps out of line? And — the decisive one, which usually settles the others before they are reached — **can he leave?** An order that offers little benefit and commands no deep conviction that the arrangement is right must impose a great deal of cost, and it can only do that where its subjects have nowhere to go.

There is no single common man in this empire, and the module treats at least five distinguishable positions. Their calculations differ, and one of them — the deportees — produces a result the corpus has not seen before.

The door was shut first

Take exit first, because in this case it is answered before any of the other terms can be reached, and it is answered twice over.

The legal position is stated plainly in the reference literature and this study takes it as scholarship rather than as a document: under the Sasanians the peasants were attached to the land, liable to forced labour and to service in the army as foot soldiers, and paid taxes to the state or to the holder of the land, or possibly to both. That is not a tenancy. A man legally attached to a piece of ground has no exit term in his cost column at all;

the calculation the framework asks him to make has one of its four variables removed by statute before he begins.

But the legal foreclosure is the smaller half, and the larger half is the one worth carrying to other cases. **The value of the Mesopotamian alluvium is the irrigation, and irrigated land is the one asset a cultivator cannot take with him.** A pastoralist's wealth walks. A dry-farmer on the plateau can, at the cost of everything, start again somewhere else. But a man whose livelihood is a share in a canal — in a distribution schedule, a maintenance obligation, a network built and repaired at state scale — owns nothing portable at all. His capital is a position in somebody else's hydraulic system, and it is worth precisely zero the moment he steps off it.

The Landscape observed that Āsōristān was the empire's fiscal engine because of its water. Module 5 finds the second half of that fact. **The more capital-intensive the agriculture, the shorter the exit ramp** — and an order that invests in irrigation is, whether it intends to or not, building the walls of its own labour force. The Sasanian state's greatest single act of construction, the sixth-century expansion of the canal network that carried the Diyala to its settlement maximum, was simultaneously its greatest act of immobilisation.

Where exit did exist, it existed at the edges, and the edges are instructive. There was flight across the Roman frontier, which meant abandoning everything and crossing a militarised border into a state that had its own tax collectors. There were the marshes at the head of the Gulf, which absorbed people who could accept a much poorer life. There were the pastoral Arab groups on the desert margin, whose relation to the empire was accordingly negotiated rather than commanded — a suggestive contrast that this module flags rather than asserts, since the evidence for it belongs to later modules.

And there was one more, and it is the sharpest thing in this section. For a Christian, there was the monastery: a legitimate exit from the household, from the obligation to marry, and from a good deal of the fiscal apparatus. The Zoroastrian order could not offer that, because in its own terms marriage and procreation were religious duties and a celibate life was not a higher state but a failure. **The rival formation Module 4 found holding the field in the alluvium also held the only respectable exit door in the empire, and the state's own religion was structurally barred from building one.** A man weighing his position had, on one side, a confession that told him his obligations were to a family and a tax assessment, and on the other, a confession that offered a way out of both.

Neither pay nor gratuity

Now what compliance cost, beginning with the obligation that is easiest to overlook because it is not money.

Ammianus Marcellinus served as an officer on the Persian frontier under Constantius and Julian, fought in the Persian wars, and wrote a description of the Sasanian empire from professional knowledge. He is a hostile witness working partly in a long Roman tradition of ethnographic contempt, and this module reads him accordingly — discounting the flourishes about oriental cruelty, and taking seriously the structural details a soldier would know and would have no reason to invent. Charles Duke Yonge's translation of 1862 is public domain:

> *In military system and discipline, by continual exercises in the business of the camp, and the adoption of the various manoeuvres which they have learnt from us, they have become formidable even to the greatest armies; they trust chiefly to the valour of their cavalry, in which all their nobles and rich men serve. Their infantry are armed like mirmillos, and are as obedient as grooms; and they always follow the cavalry like a band condemned to everlasting slavery, never receiving either pay or gratuity.*

Set that beside the reference literature's account of the peasant's obligations — corvée, and service in the army as foot soldiers — and the two independent sources describe the same institution from opposite sides. The cavalry, in which the nobles serve, is the arm that decides battles, and its members are the men Module 2 found keeping their lands and retinues. The infantry, which is the common man, walks behind it, unpaid.

This is worth stating in framework terms because it inverts a familiar assumption. Military service is often the mechanism by which a commoner acquires standing: the man who fights for the order acquires a claim on it. Here it is the opposite. **Service was extracted as an obligation of the estate rather than exchanged for anything**, which means it belonged on the cost side of the ledger and not the benefit side, and which is consistent with everything Module 2 found about a settlement that allocated standing by birth. A Roman legionary was paid and could expect land; a Sasanian foot soldier, on the account of a Roman who watched him, received neither pay nor gratuity.

Add the corvée. Somebody dug the canals, maintained the dams, and hauled the stone for the Band-e Kaisar. The reference literature is explicit that a good part of Sasanian taxation was rendered in kind — produce, or labour. The great works of this empire were paid for twice: once in the revenue that commissioned them, and once in the bodies that built them.

What he paid in the field

Before Khosrow I, the land tax was a share of the crop. The exaction was proportionate to the annual yield, assessed on the spot by royal tax collectors, and levied in kind; a poll tax was imposed on most subjects in addition, probably mostly in money.

Read the assessment mechanism as an instrument rather than as a rate, because the mechanism is where the cost actually sat. A share assessed on the spot by an official with discretion is not a percentage; it is a *relationship*. The cultivator's exposure was not a number he could plan against but the judgement of a man who arrived at harvest and decided what the crop was worth. The sources record that produce frequently spoiled before it could be assessed — which tells you that the harvest sat in the field waiting for the collector, and that the cost of the system included the crop it destroyed by delay.

Then, in the sixth century, after Kavad I's groundwork and following the Mazdakite upheaval, came Khosrow I's reform. The land was surveyed. Water rights were determined. Fixed annual rates were set for grain land, and separate rates assessed on the number of producing date palms and olive trees. Payment fell due in instalments across the year. And the poll tax was regularised: levied on males between twenty and fifty, in classes graded by means, at twelve, eight, six and four drachms, paid quarterly.

Then read the exemption list, because it is the module's central document. Exempt from the poll tax were the nobility, the clergy, the military leadership, the scribes, and those in the immediate service of the king. The nobility, with their lineage claims and their estates, were generally free of taxation altogether. The majority of the population — the free men, the peasants, the artisans, the merchants, the physicians — paid both the land tax and the poll tax.

The head tax was not a levy that happened to fall on the fourth estate. It was the operational definition of the fourth estate. Module 2 found an estate doctrine asserted as immemorial and backdated into a founding dream; Module 5 finds its fiscal edge. Rank in this order was not an abstraction about dignity. It was a line on a tax roll, and which side of it a man stood on was settled by his birth.

Was the reform a benefit to the man who paid? The honest answer is that it cut both ways and this study will not adjudicate beyond the evidence. On one side, a fixed assessment removes the collector's discretion, and removing an official's discretion is a real and substantial gain for anyone at the bottom of a relationship with an official. On the other, a fixed sum converts the cultivator's risk profile entirely: a share of a bad harvest is small, while a fixed demand in a bad year is ruinous, and the state has transferred the price risk from itself to the man least able to carry it. And there is a second-order effect that the literature notes and that anyone who has watched a

commodity market will recognise: a cash demand falling due at the same moment across a whole province forces every cultivator to sell at the same time, which collapses the price he sells at, which sends him to a lender. The reform's benefit was predictability. Its cost was that the predictable number had to be met in coin.

What he got

An honest cost column has entries on both sides, and this one does.

The water is the largest. The alluvium's productivity was not natural; it was manufactured, by canal systems that no village could have built and no group of villages could have maintained. Whatever else the Sasanian state was, it was the institution that made land support a population it could not otherwise have supported, and the archaeological record of the Diyala reaching its settlement maximum in this period is the physical measure of it. The framework asks what the common man got for his compliance, and here the answer is concrete: he got a field that was worth farming.

The coinage is the second. The Sasanian silver drachm was maintained at roughly four grams at high purity, standardised across many mints, and under Khosrow I it was tightened further. A stable coin is not an abstraction to a man who has to convert a crop into a tax payment and back into seed; a debased one is a tax on top of the tax. Whatever the empire did to its subjects, it did not systematically rob them through their money — which is more than many orders in this collection can be said to have managed.

And there was a peace of a kind. The great wars were fought on the frontier, and the Mesopotamian interior went for long stretches without an army passing through it. That is worth a great deal, and it is one of the reasons the arrangement lasted four centuries rather than one.

So the Sasanian cost column is not extraction against nothing. It is extraction against water, coin and quiet. The compliance it obtained was not merely the compliance of people with nowhere to go; it was also, for long periods, the compliance of people getting something.

For the crime of one man

Then the other side, and the instrument that made refusal expensive without requiring the state to watch anybody.

Ammianus again, in Yonge:

Their laws are remarkably severe: the most stringent are against ingratitude and against deserters; some too are abominable, inasmuch as for the crime of one man they condemn all his relations.

That is collective liability, and it is the most economical enforcement technology available to any pre-modern state. A regime with limited capacity for surveillance cannot follow every man; but it does not need to, if the penalty for one man's refusal falls on his brothers, his father and his sons. What such a law does is **convert the family into the enforcement unit**. It makes the people closest to a potential defaulter — the people who can actually see what he is doing, every day, at no cost to the treasury — into the party with the strongest possible interest in his compliance. The state does not have to police the village. The village polices itself, because the alternative is that the village is punished.

That is the "social pressure" term in the framework's calculation, and this case shows it in its institutionalised form rather than as a matter of custom. Social pressure here is not disapproval. It is a legal instrument by which the state deputises kinship.

Note also that Ammianus places the harshest laws against **deserters** — which is to say, against the exercise of exit. An order whose peasants are attached to the land and whose infantry serves unpaid is an order that must expect men to run, and it legislates accordingly.

There were softer instruments too, and they were formation-backed. Module 4 established that the Zoroastrian order reached its subjects through the units in which they measured time and handled substances. It also, on the evidence of the priestly literature, reached into what they were permitted to want: the reference literature notes precepts enjoining common men to accumulate no more than a few hundred *stēr*, that sum being deemed sufficient for a comfortable life, and restricting them in practice to one wife and small plots where the nobility had estates and multiple households. Whether such precepts were enforced is not knowable; that they were written is a fact about the order, and what they describe is a ceiling on ambition installed as piety.

The men with no exit at all

One stratum has a cost column of a different shape, and it produces the module's most portable finding.

After his campaigns against Rome, and most spectacularly after the capture of the emperor Valerian in 260, Shapur I deported populations wholesale — from Antioch, Tarsus and Caesarea — and settled them in Persis, Parthia, Khuzestan and Āsōristān. He founded cities to hold them: Weh-Andiok-Shapur, Shapur's Better Antioch, which

became Gundeshapur; and Bishapur in Fars. He put them to work on infrastructure, and the dam and bridge they raised across the Karun at Shushtar was still being called the Band-e Kaisar, Caesar's dyke, centuries later.

Consider what these people's calculation looked like. Exit was not constrained; it was zero. They were several hundred miles from home, across a militarised frontier, in a country whose language they did not speak, having arrived under guard. No cost the state might impose for non-compliance was needed, because compliance had no alternative. On the framework's usual logic, that is the condition under which an order can extract everything.

And yet the treatment they received appears, on the record, to have been comparatively good. They were given cities rather than camps. They were employed at their trades. Their religion was not suppressed — the Christianity of the Iranian plateau was substantially seeded by them, and Gundeshapur went on to become a centre of learning whose reputation traced partly to that transplanted population. A state that could have worked them to death instead built them somewhere to live.

The reason is not benevolence and this module does not attribute any. It is that **what these people supplied was skill**, and skill is the one thing that cannot be extracted by force. A man can be made to carry stone at spear-point. He cannot be made to be a good engineer, a good weaver or a good physician; the quality of that work is unverifiable at the moment of production and degrades invisibly under coercion. So the finding, which should transfer:

The terms a captive population receives track the substitutability of what it supplies, not the degree of its captivity. Where the value is undifferentiated labour, zero exit licenses maximum extraction, and the cultivator got the collector. Where the value is expertise, zero exit obliges the captor to raise the benefit term instead, because there is no other lever — and the deportees got cities. Captivity determines how much an order *can* take; the nature of the asset determines how much it *dares* to.

The line the subject court drew

And now the thing this case has that almost no other in the collection has: the compliance calculation recorded from underneath, by the people making it, in their own courts.

The Babylonian rabbinic tradition preserves three rulings attributed to Samuel of Nehardea — the man leading Babylonian Jewry in the first Sasanian generation — transmitted through the exilarch Ukban bar Nehemiah and reported in the discussion at Bava Batra 54b–55a. The first is the famous one: *dina d'malkhuta dina*, the law of the kingdom is law. The second is that a Persian land title is unassailable after forty

years of unchallenged possession. The third is that a man who takes possession of land by paying the tax lien on it holds good title.

The second deserves the attention. Jewish law gives title after three years of unchallenged working. Persian law took forty. Samuel's court applied the state's harsher rule to its own people.

That is not obedience under duress and it should not be read as such. It is **incorporation** — the subject community's own tribunal making the state's fiscal claim enforceable in the only forum whose authority its members recognised. Look at what each party obtained. The crown got its revenue collected and its land law upheld by people the taxpayer trusted, at no administrative cost whatever. The community got its courts, its calendar and its children left alone, which Module 4 established was the standing bargain. And the individual peasant, if he had hoped his own law might shelter him from the state's, discovered that it would not.

The tradition also holds the opposite in tension with it, which is what real compliance looks like rather than the tidy version: alongside the principle that the law of the kingdom is law sits the treatment, at Bava Kamma 113a, of tax collectors' money as stolen goods, with restrictions on transacting with them. The law is the law; the man who collects it is a thief. Both propositions were held at once by the same people, which is roughly how everyone under every tax authority in history has felt.

One caution, because the point is often overstated and this study will not overstate it. A further distinction is sometimes drawn — that confiscation for non-payment of the land tax generates valid title while confiscation for the poll tax does not — but that refinement belongs to the medieval halakhic commentators arguing about these passages, and it cannot be securely attributed to Samuel or to the third century. What can be attributed to the third century is the acceptance of Persian land law, including its longer and harsher term, by the community's own court within a generation of the conquest.

When the calculation broke

Twice the record shows the cost column being pushed past what it would bear, and the two occasions belong to later modules but must be registered here.

The first is 340, and it is the direct sequel to Module 4. Shapur II, at war with a newly Christian Rome and suspecting his own Christian subjects of sympathy with the enemy, ordered a doubled head tax on the Christians of the empire and instructed Shemʿon bar Ṣabbaʿe, bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, to collect it. Shemʿon refused. He was arrested, interrogated, and executed on a Good Friday placed variously in 341, 344

and 345; the numbers killed with him are given as about a hundred, as 1,150, and by Sozomen as sixteen thousand, and cannot be reconciled.

Read structurally, this is the price of Module 4's arrangement arriving on a specific date. The crown had declined to form the alluvium, and had therefore no channel into it except the leaders the rival formation produced. So it taxed the Christians through their bishop — which works perfectly while the bishop's interest and the crown's coincide, because the bishop's standing makes him a far more efficient collector than any royal agent. But the moment the levy was imposed *on the confession itself*, the bishop's position inverted. His authority came from the community, not from the crown; asked to tax his own people for being his own people, he could not comply and remain who he was. And the state discovered that between itself and a very large population it had nothing at all.

Governing through an intermediary you did not form works until the intermediary's community becomes the target — at which point the intermediary becomes the resistance. That is the finding, and it also confirms Module 4's secondary point, because the persecution manufactured martyr-acts, and martyr-acts are teaching texts. The state spent four years killing and produced a curriculum.

The second occasion is the late fifth century, and this module only records it. The reference literature's reading is that the tax burden on the peasantry became increasingly oppressive under the pressure of Hephthalite demands in the east, that recurrent famines forced kings into remissions that were not adequate, and that this oppression contributed materially to the popularity of Mazdak — whom Kavad I supported for a period, apparently as a means of humbling his own nobility. The cost column, on the sources' own account, was exceeded. But even then the agent of change was a king using a movement, not the movement using itself, and establishing that properly is Module 10's work.

Reading the cost column against the framework

The first contribution: exit has two locks, and the second is technological. The corpus asks whether the ruled can walk away. This case shows that the legal answer and the physical answer are separate questions and that the second usually decides. Sasanian peasants were legally attached to the land, but the deeper constraint is that irrigated agriculture embodies a household's entire livelihood in immovable capital it does not own. **The more capital-intensive the agriculture, the shorter the exit ramp** — and an order that invests in irrigation builds the walls of its own labour force whether or not that is the intention. The diagnostic to carry: measure exit not by what the law permits but by **what fraction of a household's livelihood is embodied in capital it**

cannot carry and does not own. By that measure the Sawad cultivator had none, the plateau dry-farmer had a little, and the pastoralist on the desert margin had a great deal — which predicts, and should be tested against, three quite different relationships with the same crown.

The second contribution: captivity sets the ceiling, but the asset sets the terms. The deportees settled at Gundeshapur and Bishapur had literally no exit and were treated comparatively well; the cultivator with almost no exit was treated as the assessment allowed. The variable that separates them is not how trapped they were but **what they supplied**. Undifferentiated labour can be compelled, so zero exit licenses maximum extraction. Skill cannot be compelled — its quality is unverifiable at the point of production — so an order holding skilled captives must raise the benefit term because it has no other lever. **The terms offered to a captive population track the substitutability of what it supplies, not the degree of its captivity.**

A third, smaller, and worth naming: collective kin liability is the cheapest enforcement technology there is. A law that condemns a man's relations for his crime does not merely raise the penalty; it relocates the enforcement function into the household, where the observation is free and continuous. An order too thin to watch its subjects can make their families watch them instead. Where the corpus finds kin liability in a legal code, it should expect to find a state with limited surveillance capacity and a strong interest in immobility — and should read the law as an admission of both.

And a confirmation with a date attached. Module 4 found the formation field ceded in the empire's richest province. Module 5 finds the invoice, presented in 340, when the crown needed to reach the Christians of the alluvium and had nothing to reach them with but a bishop who said no.

The discipline, restated. The benefit column here was not empty and it would be dishonest to write it as though it were. The water was real, the silver was good, and the interior was mostly quiet. Legibility is not pardon, but it is not condemnation either, and the reason this arrangement held for four centuries is not only that the door was shut. It is also that, for most people, in most years, the thing on the other side of the assessment was a field that grew something. What the module establishes is the shape of the ledger, not a verdict on it: that the man who paid both taxes also served unpaid, dug when told, could not leave, and could be punished for his brother's offence — and that his father and his son stood in exactly the same place, because the position was inherited and the world had been arranged to make that look like the order of things.

A note on sources. **Quoted exactly, from public-domain sources:** Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* 23.6, on the severity of Persian laws and the condemnation of a man's relations for his crime, and on the cavalry of the nobles and the infantry that

follows it without pay or gratuity, in Charles Duke Yonge's translation (Bohn's Classical Library, London, 1862), from the Project Gutenberg text of that edition. Ammianus is a hostile witness working in an established Roman tradition of ethnographic contempt for Persia, and his passages on cruelty and luxury in the same chapter are read here as topos; the structural details used above — the composition of the army, the unpaid infantry, kin liability, the character of the judiciary — are the sort of thing a serving officer on that frontier would know and would have had no motive to invent, which is why they are used and the flourishes are not.

Paraphrased and not quoted, with the constraint declared: the Sasanian royal inscriptions throughout, per this study's standing constraint. The rabbinic material — Samuel's three rulings as reported at Bava Batra 54b–55a, and the treatment of tax collectors' money at Bava Kamma 113a — is paraphrased rather than quoted, from the standard reference and halakhic literature, because Michael Rodkinson's public-domain English is abridged and non-standard and the relevant wording could not be verified within it.

A correction to Module 4. That module's source note stated that the enactment attributed to Joshua ben Gamla concerning teachers of children does not appear in Rodkinson's Baba Bathra. That claim was based on automated retrievals that were in fact being blocked before reaching the text, and it is withdrawn. What can accurately be said is that Rodkinson's own synopsis of the tract lists the enactment, that this study was unable to locate its wording in the pages it examined, and that the passage was therefore paraphrased from the standard reference literature rather than quoted. Whether Rodkinson carries it is unresolved here. The substantive argument of Module 4 does not depend on the point, but the source note was wrong and is corrected on the face of this module rather than quietly.

Paraphrased from modern scholarship, briefly and with credit: Encyclopaedia Iranica throughout — on the economy and on the fiscal system, for the attachment of peasants to the land, their liability to corvée and to infantry service, and the payment of taxes to the state or the landholder or both; for the pre-reform land tax as a share of the crop proportionate to annual yield, assessed on the spot by royal collectors and levied in kind, with a poll tax in addition; for the observation that produce frequently spoiled before assessment; and for the payment of a good part of taxation in kind or in corvée. On Khosrow I's reform: the land survey, the determination of water rights, fixed rates for grain land and per producing date palm and olive tree, and the poll tax on males between twenty and fifty in graded classes at twelve, eight, six and four drachms, paid quarterly. On the class system: the exemption of the nobility from taxation generally and of clergy, military leadership, scribes and royal servants from the poll tax, against a

majority paying both; and the precepts limiting common men in wives, in landholding and in accumulation. On the late fifth century: the increasing tax burden, Hephthalite pressure, recurrent famines and inadequate remissions, and Kavad I's use of the Mazdakite movement against his nobility. Also the standard literature on Shapur I's deportations from Antioch, Tarsus and Caesarea into Persis, Parthia, Khuzestan and Āsōristān, on the foundation of Weh-Andiok-Shapur (Gundeshapur) and Bishapur, and on the Band-e Kaisar at Shushtar; the numismatic literature on the weight and purity of the Sasanian drachm; Robert McC. Adams for the Diyala settlement maximum; and the reference literature on Shemʿon bar Ṣabbaʿe.

Dates and figures, with their disputes attached. Shemʿon bar Ṣabbaʿe's execution is placed variously in 341, 344 and 345, and the numbers who died with him are given as about a hundred, as 1,150, and by Sozomen as sixteen thousand; no reconciliation is offered here. Encyclopaedia Iranica's article on the fiscal system states that the double personal tax on Christians was abolished under Shapur II, which does not square with the Syriac martyr-acts in which he imposes it; the discrepancy is unresolved and is flagged rather than silently decided. The poll-tax classes and the age band of twenty to fifty come to us through Arabic historians drawing on the lost Sasanian court chronicle, and are therefore the state's own account of its own reform.

This module's own weak links. There are no Sasanian tax registers. Everything above about what the common man actually paid is reconstructed from Arabic historians working centuries later from a court chronicle, from scattered passages in Pahlavi legal literature this study cannot quote, from Syriac martyr-acts written to edify, and from a Roman officer who hated the place. Encyclopaedia Iranica's own account of Khosrow's reforms concedes that the picture drawn from the Islamic sources is hard to reconcile with the details scattered through the Babylonian Talmud — which is a warning that the tidy reform narrative may be tidier than the reality, and this module has not resolved it. The reading of the deportees' treatment as comparatively good rests on the absence of evidence of atrocity and on the visible outcomes — cities, employment, surviving communities — rather than on any source describing their conditions; a reader who declines that inference should decline the second contribution with it. And the proposition that irrigation was the operative constraint on exit is this study's structural argument, not a claim any source makes; what the sources supply is the legal attachment, and the technological argument is offered as such.

MODULE 6

In Their Pay Forever

Module 6 · Extraction — the three ways a man could hold property and the one that put it beyond the king, the gold Rome paid that each side had to describe differently at home, the campaign whose object was cash city by city, and what the whole apparatus was actually buying

Four purses

An order of this size draws on four sources, and they behave differently enough that they have to be taken separately.

The first is what it takes from its own subjects — the crop share, the head tax, the corvée and the unpaid infantry that Module 5 laid out. The second is what it can reach of the property of its own elites, which Module 2 found it reaching for at the founding when it extinguished the provincial fires and took their endowments. The third is what it can extract from other states, by treaty or by force. And the fourth is what it can charge for the passage of goods across the ground it controls.

This module takes the second, third and fourth, since the first is already on the table, and then asks the question that matters more than any of them: where did it go?

The answer to that last question is not the one the moralising version of this history expects. The Sasanian fisc did not principally disappear into luxury. It went into cavalry, into walls, into water, and into a capital — and the argument of the final section is that the sixth century's simultaneous peak of extraction and peak of construction was not a coincidence but a single operation, whose purpose was to buy the crown out of a dependency it had accepted at the founding.

Three ways to hold property

Module 2 ended with a prediction, and it can now be tested. The prediction was that the property confiscated from the provincial fire foundations at the founding did not enlarge the crown's permanent resources so much as change the ownership of a sector, because it was re-alienated almost at once into new endowments; and that the Sasanian crown therefore spent its life with a large and growing block of property permanently outside the fisc under religious title, as the corpus has found in monastic and *waqf* cases.

The evidence bears on it directly, and it confirms the first half and forces a correction to the second — which is a better result than confirmation.

The Sasanian law book — the *Hazār Dādestān*, "A Thousand Judgements," compiled by Farroxmard ī Wahrāmān in the early seventh century and known from its first editor by the erroneous title *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān* — divides inherited property into three categories. Property held *pad xwēšīh*, with the right of possession. Property held *pad stūrīh*, in trusteeship. And property held *pad ruwān*, for the preservation of the soul. This study cannot quote the law book, for the reason declared in Module 2 and repeated here: Bulsara's public-domain English of 1937 is judged by specialists to fall short of scholarly standards and its copyright position is unresolved, while the reliable editions of Perikhanian and Macuch are modern and in copyright. What follows is therefore paraphrase from the reference literature, and it is offered as such.

A foundation for the soul — *ruwānagān* — worked like this. A man set aside part of his estate, in his lifetime or by testament, dedicated to the benefit of his soul: to funding the ceremonies to be performed for him after death, or to charitable works held to have the same effect. The dedicated property might finance a fire temple, endowed with income-producing assets described as the ownership of the fire or the property of the fire. It might equally finance objects of public utility — roads, bridges, irrigation canals. The founder named a guardian or trustee, and could name whom he liked; if he named nobody, his son or another relation was obliged to serve. **The principal could not be alienated.** Only the income was spendable. And the beneficiaries — his descendants, or whomever he specified — held the right of usufruct.

Now read that as an instrument rather than as piety, which is what the law book itself does; the reference literature notes that the *Hazār Dādestān* treats fire foundations, soul-endowments and pious gifts purely as legal questions, without a word of religion anywhere near them.

What a man obtained by founding a *ruwānagān* was this. His estate became inalienable, which meant it could not be broken up by division among heirs, sold under pressure, or lost through a descendant's incompetence. Its income continued to flow to his family, since the beneficiaries held usufruct and the trusteeship stayed in the household by default. And — the point — the reference literature's judgement is that pious foundations were **probably safe from confiscation by the government**.

That is a perpetual, unbreakable, confiscation-proof family trust, and its legal name is the salvation of a soul. The corpus has now met this device three times, invented independently in three religious traditions: the monastic endowment, the *waqf*, and the *ruwānagān*. The convergence is the interesting thing. Wherever a propertied class

faces a sovereign who can take what he likes, somebody works out that property dedicated to God cannot be taken, and everybody else follows.

But the prediction was wrong in its second half, and the correction is the module's first finding. The reference literature on the Sasanian legal system states that the income of profit-bearing foundations was spent on their upkeep, on the payment of the guardians and trustees — and on taxes. The endowments were not tax-exempt. The revenue stream kept flowing to the fisc.

So what actually left the crown's reach was not the annual yield. It was the **capital**. The state went on collecting from the land; it simply lost the power to seize, sell or reassign the land itself.

And that distinction is worth carrying to every other case in the collection, because it inverts the usual question. In ordinary years a sovereign wants the yield, and the yield was still there. It is in the emergency — the lost war, the succession crisis, the collapsed harvest, the army that must be paid this month or will change sides — that a sovereign needs the *asset*: something he can sell, mortgage, or simply take. **The endowment does not shelter income from the tax collector; it shelters the asset from the king.** Which means an order that has permitted large-scale perpetual endowment has disarmed itself precisely and only for the situation in which it will need the weapon. The diagnostic for other cases is therefore not *is religious property tax-exempt* but **is religious property confiscable** — and if the answer is no, the order has a fiscal ceiling in a crisis that its ordinary accounts will never show.

One further observation, and it belongs on the credit side. Because the permitted purposes included roads, bridges and canals, the *ruwānagān* was also a mechanism by which private wealth built public infrastructure. The grandee Mihr Narseh's fifth-century bridge in the Firuzabad district carried an inscription recording that he had built it for his own soul. A device that immobilises elite property also, in this system, gets bridges built — which is why nobody had an obvious interest in stopping it, and why it grew.

What the subjects' money bought

Module 5 established what the common man paid. This module asks where it went, and the sixth-century answer is unusually legible because the spending is still standing in the ground.

Cavalry. The largest single change of the reform period is that the crown began paying, arming and mounting its own heavy horse. The framework should register what that means. Module 1 found that the army which made Ardashir king was the sum of the great houses' retinues, brought to the field by their lords and equipped at

their expense; Module 2 found a settlement that left those retinues untouched. A crown that pays its own cavalry is buying its way out of that arrangement. The fiscal reform and the military reform are one operation, and its object is the problem Module 8 exists to examine.

Walls. The Sasanians built linear defensive systems against the steppe on a scale that has no parallel in the period — the fortifications at Darband on the Caspian shore, and the great Gorgan Wall running east from the south-eastern corner of the Caspian, which the specialist literature calls the largest single investment in military infrastructure made by either empire in the region. That is where a very great deal of the revenue went, and where much of the corvée went with it.

Water. The sixth-century expansion of the canal network, the Nahrawan above all, which carried the Diyala to the settlement maximum recorded in Adams's survey. Extraction financing the thing that made further extraction possible.

A capital. Ctesiphon, the palaces, and the great vaulted hall at Taq-e Kasra whose arch still stands.

The point to hold is that the extraction was not simply consumed. The sixth century was the empire's fiscal peak and its construction peak at the same time, and the two facts are the same fact. Whether the works were worth what they cost is a question this module leaves open and Module 11 will have to answer.

In their pay forever

Now the third purse, which is the most revealing thing in the module because we can watch the two parties argue about what it was.

Across the fifth and sixth centuries the Roman empire paid gold to the Sasanian empire. In the fifth century the payments were irregular — sums in the region of five hundred pounds of gold at intervals, framed as a Roman contribution to the defence of the Caucasus passes against the peoples beyond them. Theodosius II's unwillingness to keep paying is given as the occasion of Yazdegerd II's war in 440. Kavad I besieged and took Amida in 503 in retaliation for non-payment. The Eternal Peace of 532 fixed a lump sum. The Fifty-Year Peace of 562 fixed an annual one, with the first seven years payable at once. And in 572 the ambassador Sebukht was sent to Constantinople to collect the year's five hundred pounds, was dismissed by Justin II, and the refusal opened a war that ran for twenty years.

Procopius, who was Belisarius's legal secretary and present for much of this, reports the negotiation of 540 in which Khosrow I set out what he thought the money was. H. B. Dewing's translation is public domain:

> *"For thus," he said, "the Persians will keep the peace secure for them, guarding the Caspian Gates themselves and no longer feeling resentment at them on account of the city of Daras, in return for which the Persians themselves will be in their pay forever." "So," said the ambassadors, "the Persians desire to have the Romans subject and tributary to themselves." "No," said Chosroes, "but the Romans will have the Persians as their own soldiers for the future, dispensing to them a fixed payment for their service; for you give an annual payment of gold to some of the Huns and to the Saracens, not as tributary subjects to them, but in order that they may guard your land unplundered for all time."*

That exchange is the whole method of this collection compressed into a paragraph. One transfer of gold; two incompatible descriptions; and both parties perfectly aware of the other's description and arguing about it to their faces. The Roman ambassadors say the word *tributary* out loud because that is what their own domestic audience will hear if they agree. Khosrow refuses it and offers instead a formula in which Persia is a contractor and Rome the paymaster — which is, note, the humbler-sounding version, and which he can afford because his own domestic audience will be told something else entirely.

And it was. The later Iranian tradition, in Ṭabarī and in the Shahnameh, reports these payments straightforwardly as tribute rendered by Rome to the King of Kings. Modern scholarship generally dismisses that as exaggeration, and reads the transfers as defence-sharing or as pay-offs to a predatory neighbour — but it is worth naming the paymaster of that judgement too, because it is made almost entirely from the Byzantine sources, which are the ones that survive in quantity. Pseudo-Joshua, Procopius, Malalas, Menander: all of them writing for the paying side, all of them needing the payment not to have been tribute.

So the framework should take this: **a transfer between two orders is described differently at each end, and neither description is aimed at the other party. Both face inward.** The gold is the same gold. What varies is what each robe requires the payment to have been — and the historian inherits whichever side's archive survived, which means the question *was it tribute or subsidy* is very often a question about record-keeping rather than about the transaction.

There is a harder structural point underneath it. By the sixth century a material portion of the Sasanian fisc consisted of a foreign government's discretionary payment. That is the most brittle revenue there is. It cannot be assessed, surveyed or enforced; it depends entirely on the other party's calculation of what peace is worth this year. And the record shows exactly what happens when the calculation changes: in 503 and again in 572, a refusal to pay produced a war. **Externally sourced revenue converts a**

budget shortfall directly into a casus belli, because the only collection mechanism available is an army. An empire that funds part of its Caucasus establishment from Constantinople has quietly given Constantinople a lever, and has given its own war party a permanent argument.

Cash, city by city

The fourth mechanism was simply taking it, and Procopius describes the operation with a bookkeeper's clarity.

In 540 Khosrow broke the Eternal Peace and came west. He was not, on this account, attempting to conquer Syria. He was collecting. At Antioch he sent his negotiator up to the walls and named a price — ten centenaria of gold to go away, and Procopius adds that it was obvious he would have taken less. At Chalcis, further along, the terms were the same and the town poorer:

> *and with difficulty they collected two centenaria of gold, for the city they inhabited was not very prosperous, and they gave them to Chosroes as the price of their lives and thus saved both the city and themselves.*

And when the Syrian towns had been worked through, Procopius states the next step without any diplomatic covering at all: Khosrow did not wish to return by the road he had come, but to cross the Euphrates *and gather by plunder as much money as possible from Mesopotamia.*

Read that as a line in a budget. Plunder is the cheapest revenue any state can raise: no survey, no assessment, no collector, no register, no arrears, and the collection costs are borne by an army that has to be paid anyway. Its price is that it destroys the base it draws from — and in this particular configuration it destroys a base the Sasanian fisc was also drawing on by treaty. Every Syrian city ransomed in 540 was a Roman taxpayer less able to fund the annual payment that Khosrow would demand in 562. The raiding line item and the treaty line item were in competition with each other, and nothing in the structure of the Sasanian state gave anybody the job of noticing.

The passage-charge purse can be handled briefly, because the evidence for it is thin and this study will not inflate it. The empire sat across the land routes between China and the Mediterranean and drew something from it; the reference literature assumes tolls on caravans and charges for irrigation water but concedes that what share the state took is unknown. The frontier trade with Rome was channelled through designated markets, which is a customs arrangement as much as a security one. The Sasanians took Yemen in 570 and had interests down the Gulf. And the Byzantine answer to the whole

position — the smuggling of silkworm eggs out of the east around 550 and the establishment of sericulture inside the Roman empire — was an attack on the intermediary's rent rather than on his armies, and a more effective one.

Reading extraction against the framework

The first contribution, and it is a correction of this study's own prediction. Module 2 forecast that the property re-alienated into religious endowment would leave the fisc. It did not: the reference literature is explicit that the income of profit-bearing foundations bore taxes along with the trustees' costs. What left the crown's reach was the capital. The principal of a *ruwānagān* was inalienable, the trusteeship stayed in the founder's family, the beneficiaries held usufruct, and the whole was — on the specialist reading — probably immune from government confiscation. So: **a perpetual religious endowment shelters the asset from the sovereign, not the income from the tax collector.** The consequence is precise and it is not visible in any ordinary year's accounts. A crown collects yield in normal times and needs *capital* in a crisis — something to sell, mortgage or seize when an army must be paid this month. An order that has permitted large-scale perpetual endowment has therefore disarmed itself for exactly the emergency in which the weapon would matter, while its revenues look untouched. The diagnostic to carry into other cases: not *is religious property exempt from tax*, but **is religious property confiscable**.

The second contribution: transfers between orders are described inward at both ends. Procopius records Khosrow and the Roman ambassadors disputing, in each other's presence, whether the same gold was tribute or a contractor's fee — each pressing the description his own domestic audience required, each knowing the other's. The Iranian tradition afterwards reported tribute; the Byzantine sources reported subsidy; modern scholarship reads subsidy, because the Byzantine archive is the one that survived in bulk. **Where two orders exchange value, expect two irreconcilable accounts, both composed for home consumption, and expect the surviving one to be the winner's or the record-keeper's rather than the truer.** The practical instruction for this collection is to name the archive's paymaster before adjudicating the transaction.

A third, narrower, with two dates attached. Externally sourced revenue has no collection mechanism except war. When the payer stops — Theodosius II before 440, Anastasius before 503, Justin II in 572 — the recipient's only instrument for enforcing the debt is an army, and a fiscal shortfall therefore converts directly into a campaign. An order that funds a standing military establishment from a rival's treasury has built a machine that must periodically attack its own creditor.

And an honest entry on the other side, because this module has been describing taking. The extraction financed a salaried cavalry that reduced the crown's dependence on other men's retinues; the largest fortification systems in the region; the canal network that carried the alluvium to its greatest recorded extent; and a capital. The sixth century's peak of extraction and peak of construction were the same operation. Whether the empire got value for it is Module 11's question, and Module 10's answer to who ended the order may turn on whether the buy-out of the great houses was completed or merely begun.

The discipline, restated. None of the above requires anyone in this story to have been greedy. A grandee who converted his estate into a soul-foundation was buying his family's security from a sovereign who could otherwise take it, and getting a bridge built; a king who took ten centenaria from Antioch was funding a frontier; an emperor who paid eleven thousand pounds of gold was buying time for a war in Italy. Each was weighing benefit against credible cost with the materials in front of him. The sum of those reasonable calculations was an empire whose capital was progressively immobilised, whose revenue partly depended on its enemy's goodwill, and whose cheapest income destroyed the base of its second-cheapest. Nobody decided that. It accumulated.

A note on sources. **Quoted exactly, from public-domain sources:** Procopius, *History of the Wars*, Book II, on the negotiation of 540 — Khosrow's argument that the Persians would be in Roman pay forever and the ambassadors' reply that this made Rome tributary — and on the ransoming of Chalcis, in H. B. Dewing's translation (Loeb Classical Library, 1914), taken from the Project Gutenberg text of that edition; Dewing's Procopius volumes I–III are public domain because the copyright has lapsed. The demand of ten centenaria from Antioch, Procopius's gloss on the weight of a centenarium, and the statement that Khosrow crossed the Euphrates to gather by plunder as much money as possible from Mesopotamia are from the same text and are summarised rather than quoted at length.

Paraphrased and not quoted, with the constraint declared: the Sasanian law book *Hazār Dādestān*, throughout — the threefold classification of inherited property, the mechanics of foundations for the soul, the inalienability of the principal, the appointment and default succession of trustees, and the treatment of these institutions as purely legal questions. This study does not quote it, for the reasons set out in Module 2: Bulsara's 1937 English is judged by Perikhanian to fall short of scholarly standards and its copyright position is unresolved, while Perikhanian's and Macuch's editions are modern and in copyright. All Sasanian royal inscriptions are likewise paraphrased, per the standing constraint. Menander Protector, the principal source for

the treaty of 562, is used only through the reference literature, since the standard translation is modern.

Paraphrased from modern scholarship, briefly and with credit: Encyclopaedia Iranica on charitable foundations, on inheritance in the Sasanian period (including the judgement that pious foundations were probably safe from government confiscation and that securing an income for descendants was among the main motives for founding them), on the Sasanian legal system (the ownership and property of the fires, the permitted financing of roads, bridges and canals, and the payment of taxes out of foundation income), on the *Mādayān ī Hazār Dādestān* and its correct title, on the fiscal system, and on Byzantine–Iranian relations; Maria Macuch, whose work underlies most of the above and whose editions this study cannot quote; the recent literature on the *zīndag ruwān* ceremony for Mihr Narseh's bridge inscription at Firuzabad; the specialist literature on the Caucasus defences at Darband and the Gorgan Wall; Robert McC. Adams for the Diyala; and the numismatic literature on the Sasanian drachm.

Figures and dates, with their disputes attached. The fifth-century Roman payments for the Caucasus are given in the literature as roughly five hundred pounds of gold at irregular intervals, and the irregularity is part of the point. The Eternal Peace sum is 110 centenaria, which Procopius glosses as one hundred pounds each, hence eleven thousand pounds of gold; some modern accounts render the same sum as 110,000 solidi, and the two are different ways of counting the same payment rather than competing figures. The annual subsidy under the treaty of 562 is generally given as 30,000 gold pieces, with the first seven years paid in advance, and the sum Sebukht was sent to collect in 572 as five hundred pounds; these are not straightforwardly reconcilable and are given as reported. The ten centenaria demanded of Antioch and the two collected at Chalcis are Procopius's figures, from the losing side.

This module's own weak links. There are no Sasanian budgets, no treasury accounts and no surviving registers; every statement above about the shape of the fisc is inferred from legal casuistry, from a hostile foreign historian, and from what is still standing in the ground. The central claim that pious foundations were immune from confiscation is the specialist reading and is stated in the reference literature with the qualifier "probably"; the module's first contribution rests on it and would need revising if a clear case of royal confiscation of a *ruwānagān* were established. The proportion of total revenue represented by Roman payments cannot be calculated and no proportion is offered here; the claim is only that it was material enough that its interruption twice produced war, which the dates support. The treatment of the 540 campaign as a revenue operation rather than a war of conquest follows Procopius's own account of its

conduct, and Procopius is the enemy's secretary. And the reading of Khosrow I's military and fiscal reforms as a single operation aimed at buying the crown out of dependence on noble retinues is this study's structural argument, to be tested in Module 8 rather than assumed here.

MODULE 7

The Temples Destroyed by His Fathers

Module 7 · Information & Suppression — a priest who carved his own career on four cliffs, a lamp taken from a sick man's room, a church council that recorded its own persecution at the king's invitation, and the rule that the fullest account of a suppression is written after the suppressor is gone

Three archives, which is two more than usual

This collection normally has to reconstruct suppression out of the suppressor's own papers, and the reconstruction is always partly guesswork. This case is different, and the difference is the reason the module can reach a firmer result than most.

Three separate archives survive, made by three parties with opposed interests, covering the same ground and often the same decades. There is the suppressor's own account: the inscriptions of Kirdir, carved in the first person on four rock faces in Fars in the last quarter of the third century, listing what he did to whom. There is the internal, contemporaneous record of one subject community: the Babylonian Talmud, produced across four centuries by rabbis living in the empire's richest province, which mentions the Zoroastrian priesthood repeatedly and always from underneath. And there is the official, licensed record of another: the synodical acts of the Church of the East, beginning with the council convoked by the King of Kings himself in 410, and preserved in the *Synodicon Orientale*.

Read against each other, these three tell a story that none of them tells alone, and the story is not the simple one about an intolerant theocracy. It is stranger and more instructive: an order that suppressed intermittently, licensed continuously, could not see the province it taxed except through the eyes of the people it periodically struck, and generated most of its persecution as a by-product of its own routine housekeeping rather than as policy.

The man scored on his own boast

Kirdir was a Zoroastrian priest who rose under Shapur I and reached the height of his power under Bahram I and Bahram II. He is the only non-royal figure of the Sasanian centuries to have left monumental inscriptions in his own name, and he left

four, in the first person, at Naqsh-e Rustam, Naqsh-e Rajab, Sar Mashhad and on the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt.

This study paraphrases them and does not quote, under the constraint declared in Module 1 and repeated at every point of use: every edition and translation of the Sasanian inscriptions is modern and in copyright. What they report is this. Throughout the empire the service of Ohrmazd and the yazads was made pre-eminent and the Mazdayasnian religion and the magi given great dignity. Ahriman and the *dēvs* were punished and rebuked and their teaching driven out. Idols were destroyed and the dwellings of the demons broken up and made into seats of the gods. Many Bahram fires were founded, many magi made prosperous, many fires and magi installed by imperial authority. And — in one clause — Jews, *šramans* (Buddhists), Brahmins, Nazoraeans, Christians, Maktaks (Baptisers) and *zandīks* (Manichaeans) were struck down in the empire.

Now apply the standing correction, because this sentence is quoted far more often than it is interrogated.

Who produced it, and what was he scored on? Kirdir produced it, about himself, in the first person, on stone, at the summit of a career he spends the rest of the same inscription enumerating: the titles he was given, the kings who advanced him, the honours he accumulated. It is not a record of policy. It is a curriculum vitae. Parvaneh Pourshariati's caution belongs on the page rather than in a footnote: it is not clear how far Kirdir's declarations reflect the actual implementation, or for that matter the success, of the measures he claims to have promoted. A man carving his own achievements has every reason to make the list long and the verbs strong, and no reason whatever to record a campaign that fizzled.

Two internal features of the sentence are worth more than the sentence itself.

The first is that it names two kinds of Christian, using two different words — *nāṣrāyē* and *kristyān* — which the specialist literature generally reads as the Aramaic-speaking natives of Mesopotamia on the one hand and the Greek-speaking deportees of Module 5 on the other. That is a fact about the state's *information* rather than about its violence. Whoever compiled that list could distinguish the empire's Christians by origin and language, which means somebody had counted, or at least classified, them.

The second is the placement. The striking of the minorities is one clause in a long recital, sitting between fires founded and magi made prosperous. Structurally it belongs with the career achievements, not with a programme of state. Which raises the question the rest of the module is about: if this was the high-water mark of Sasanian religious suppression, why does the subject communities' own evidence look so different from what a reader of Kirdir would expect?

What the state could actually see

Begin with a structural fact established two modules ago, because it determines everything about the crown's information.

Module 4 found that the order declined to form the population of its richest province, for reasons that were constitutional rather than deliberate: a hereditary priesthood that could not recruit outsiders, serving a social scheme built on the line between *ēr* and *anēr*. Module 5 found the consequence: the crown governed and taxed the alluvium through intermediaries it had not formed — the exilarch for the Jews, the bishop and later the catholicos for the Christians — and discovered in 340 what happens when the intermediary's community becomes the target.

The information consequence follows directly and it is the module's least comfortable finding. **The state's picture of its wealthiest and most populous province was supplied by the leaders of the communities it periodically struck.** There was no Zoroastrian parish structure in the Sawad, no clergy of the state religion embedded in Aramaic-speaking villages, no formation apparatus generating loyal informants. When the crown wanted to know what was happening among several million subjects, it asked the men whose predecessors it had executed.

That is a self-blinding arrangement, and it is the direct fiscal and administrative price of the formation decision. It also explains a pattern the sources show and the standard narrative flattens: Sasanian religious policy oscillates violently between reigns — Shapur I keeping Mani at court, Bahram I killing him; Shapur II's forty-year persecution, Yazdegerd I's licensing council; Yazdegerd II closing the Jewish schools, Kavad and Khosrow dealing with the exilarchate again. An order that cannot see a population directly must rely on whichever intermediary is currently in front of it, and its policy will swing with the intermediary.

What the Jews wrote at the time

Now the contemporaneous internal record, and it is the most valuable single body of evidence in this study.

The Babylonian Talmud names the Zoroastrian priests. The Aramaic word is *ḥabrā*, plural *ḥabbarei*, and the reference literature treats them as Zoroastrian priests whose influence in Babylonia increased through the third century after the Sasanian accession, placing their appearance at roughly the end of the first quarter of that century — which is to say, at the conquest.

What the rabbis record them doing is specific and it is worth listing exactly, because the list is the argument. The *ḥabbarei* forbade the Jews to light lamps on Zoroastrian

festival days. They interfered with burial. They interfered with the slaughter of animals. They interfered with the observance of festivals.

The most detailed passage sits in the middle of a technical discussion about authenticating a bill of divorce. Rabbah bar bar Hana is ill; two colleagues come to visit him; and while they are there a *ḥabrā* comes in and takes away the lamp, because it is a Persian festival on which fire may not burn outside the fire temples. And the sick man cries out — in the standard rendering, which this study paraphrases rather than quotes because Rodkinson's abridged English could not be verified for this passage — that God should let them live either in His shadow or in the shadow of the sons of Esau, meaning Rome.

Jacob Neusner made the observation that unlocks the whole passage: it seems incongruous that so slight an inconvenience as the removal of a lamp should have elicited such anguished despair. He is right, and the incongruity is the evidence. A man does not ask to be delivered to the Roman Empire because someone took his lamp. **The scale of the recorded grievance is wildly out of proportion to the recorded incident, which tells you that the record is not a register of events but the expression of a relationship** — and that the recorded item is standing in for something the record does not contain.

Two further things follow, and both are structural.

First: look at what the interference actually consists of. Lamps on Zoroastrian festival days. Burial. Slaughter. Every single one is a collision point between two purity systems rather than an attack on a doctrine. Zoroastrian law protects fire from defilement and the earth from corpses and water from pollution; Jewish law requires the dead to be buried in the ground and requires animals killed in a particular way. The *ḥabrā* who takes the lamp is not attacking Judaism. He is enforcing a rule about fire, on a day when the rule applies, in a house that happens to contain Jews.

This yields the module's first contribution and it generalises well beyond this case. **A formation that runs through purity categories generates persecution as a by-product of its own routine operation, without anyone forming a policy.** Module 4 established that the Zoroastrian order reached its own people through the units in which they measured time and handled substances — the calendar that named a divinity every day, the rules governing fire, earth, water and corpses. Those categories do not stop at the edge of the community that holds them. They are claims about what may be done to fire and earth *anywhere*, and where a state gives the holders of such categories jurisdiction — as Module 2 found this state doing at the founding, on Agathias's testimony that justice was placed in the magi's hands — the neighbour's ordinary life becomes illegal without anybody deciding that it should.

And this is worse than a policy of persecution rather than better, for a precise reason: **there is nothing to repeal.** A decree can be withdrawn by the king who issued it. A purity rule is not a decree; it is the shape of the world for the people enforcing it, and no king can revoke it without unmaking his own order's formation. Which is why the interference is continuous and low-grade across four centuries while the actual persecutions are episodic — and why the low-grade version produced a cry to be handed over to Rome.

Second: the rabbis' own anxiety runs the other way from what one would expect. The modern reading of these passages — and this study takes it as scholarship, not as its own finding — is that the Talmud's statements about the danger from the magi are hyperbolic, reflecting the severity of particular incidents rather than their frequency; and that the amoraim were actively concerned to *discredit* the magi, ridiculing Zoroastrian theology, because they feared the magi's attractiveness to a Jewish population already drawn to magic. On that reading the magi were not crusaders but educators, and the rabbis were fighting a competitor.

That is Module 4's finding confirmed from the far side of the line. The rival formation apparatus regarded the state's formation as a rival for the same children — which is what a formation apparatus is for, and which is exactly what one would expect if the operative contest was over who installed the picture of the world rather than over who held power.

What the Christians wrote, and by whose leave

Now the licensed archive, and it produces the module's title.

In 410 the King of Kings Yazdegerd I convoked a council of the Christian bishops of his empire at Seleucia-Ctesiphon, brokered through the Roman envoy Marutha of Maypherqat. Forty bishops came, from as far as the Roman frontier and the shores of the Gulf. The council organised the Christians of the empire into a single structured church, recognised Isaac of Seleucia-Ctesiphon as its head, arranged the Persian dioceses on Roman metropolitan lines, and accepted the creed of Nicaea. Its acts are preserved in the *Synodicon Orientale*, and J.-B. Chabot's French translation of 1902 is public domain. The record opens like this:

> *En la 11e année du règne de Yezdegerd, Roi des rois, victorieux; après que la paix et la tranquillité furent rétablies pour les églises du Seigneur, (ce prince) donna la liberté et le repos aux congrégations du Christ... il écarta la tempête de la persécution de toutes les églises de Dieu; il dissipa l'obscurité de l'oppression de tous les troupeaux du Christ; il avait, en effet, ordonné dans tout son empire que les*

temples détruits par ses pères fussent magnifiquement reconstruits de son temps; que les autels qui avaient été démolis fussent soigneusement restaurés; que ceux qui avaient été éprouvés pour Dieu, qui avaient souffert les prisons et les tortures, sortissent en liberté; que les prêtres, les chefs et toute la sainte alliance circulassent en toute liberté et sans crainte.

In the eleventh year of the reign of Yazdegerd, King of Kings, the victorious — after peace and tranquillity were restored to the churches of the Lord, that prince gave liberty and rest to the congregations of Christ; he turned aside the storm of persecution from all the churches of God; he dispersed the darkness of oppression from all the flocks of Christ; for he had ordered throughout his empire that **the temples destroyed by his fathers** should be magnificently rebuilt in his time; that the altars which had been demolished should be carefully restored; that those who had been tested for God, who had suffered prisons and tortures, should go out free; and that the priests, the leaders and all the holy covenant should move about in complete liberty and without fear.

Read that as an instrument, because it is one.

A subject community's official record, produced at the imperial capital, at the king's invitation, states on its own first page that the previous kings destroyed its buildings and tortured its clergy. **The persecution is in the archive because the state convened the meeting.** Nothing was suppressed; the memory of Shapur II's forty years was written down, in the capital, with royal permission, and preserved for sixteen centuries.

And then look at what the state received in exchange. It received a single head, elected under its supervision, whom it could hold answerable for the whole Christian population of the empire. It received a hierarchy organised on lines the state could map onto its own provinces. And, on the reference literature's account of the synod, it received an arrangement in which the secular arm would repress those who proved insubordinate to the catholicos — that is, the state's coercive power was placed behind the bishop's authority over his own flock.

This yields the module's second contribution. **An order that licenses a subject community's record is not exercising tolerance; it is acquiring a counterparty.** A licensed record is more useful to a state than a suppressed one, for three reasons that have nothing to do with generosity: it names a person who can be held to account; it puts the community's own authority behind the state's enforcement, so that dissent inside the community becomes the community's problem rather than the state's; and it produces, at no cost, a written account of the community's own affairs which the state may consult.

The Sasanians had learned this the hard way. Module 5 traced the collapse of the informal version in 340, when Shapur II ordered the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon to collect a doubled tax on his own people and the bishop refused. In 410 the same arrangement was rebuilt, formally, with the state supplying the bishop's authority instead of merely leaning on it. The council that Christian historiography compares to the Edict of Milan is, read structurally, the reconstruction of a tax and information channel that had broken seventy years earlier.

Then it broke again, and the target was the schools

The fifth century supplies the counter-case, and its target selection is the most revealing thing in the module.

Under Yazdegerd II, in 455, the Jews of the empire were forbidden to observe the Sabbath **openly and publicly**. By 467 or 468 the Jewish schools were closed and some of the community's leaders executed. At Isfahan, on the tradition, Jews flayed two Zoroastrian priests alive; the reprisal is reported as the killing of a large part of the city's Jewish population and the raising of their children as fire-worshippers. In 470 or 471, under Peroz, the exilarch Huna V was executed, and the exilarchate stood vacant through the remaining years of the persecution. Later still, during the Mazdakite disturbances, the exilarch Mar Zutra II attempted an armed independence around Mahoza and was executed on the bridge there when Kavad was restored.

Two features of that sequence matter more than the body count.

The first is the phrasing of 455. The decree does not abolish the Sabbath; it forbids observing it *openly and publicly*. That is a suppression of visibility rather than of practice, and it tells you precisely what the state minded. A Sabbath kept behind a door is not a fiscal problem, a security problem or a purity problem. A Sabbath kept in the street is a public demonstration that a large population in the capital's own province lives by a calendar that is not the king's — and Module 4 established that the calendar was the deepest instrument the order possessed. The decree is aimed at the rival calendar's *visibility*, which is the one thing a formation-based order cannot tolerate in its own heartland.

The second is that when the state finally moved in earnest, it closed **the schools**. Not the synagogues, not the courts, not the exilarchate first — the schools. That is the state, four centuries late, identifying correctly where the province had been lost. Module 4 found the field ceded to institutions that took children at six or seven; in 467 the crown attacked those institutions directly. It is the only recorded moment in this study at which the Sasanian state acted as though it understood the formation

problem, and it came about two hundred and forty years after the moment when acting on it might have mattered.

Who wrote the persecution down, and when

And now the source observation that this module exists to make, because it bears on every case in the collection.

The persecution narrative just summarised — the decrees of 455, the closures of 467, the execution of 470 — does not come from the Babylonian Talmud. It comes overwhelmingly from later chronicles: the *Iggeret* of Sherira Gaon, written in the tenth century, and the *Seder Olam Zuta*, ninth. Both were composed under Islamic rule, long after the Sasanian empire had ceased to exist.

Meanwhile the contemporaneous internal record — the Bavli itself, produced continuously through the whole period by people living in the middle of it — is strikingly reticent about the Sasanian state. It records lamps and slaughter and burial. It ridicules Zoroastrian theology. It reports individual encounters. What it does not do is set out a narrative of imperial persecution.

The standard scholarly reading of that reticence has been that there was little to record: that the Sasanian empire affected the Jews mainly by leaving them alone to flourish in seclusion, an interpretation that recent work has begun to challenge. This study does not adjudicate that debate. What it does is name the structural rule that the pattern demonstrates, which holds whichever way the debate resolves.

A subject community's contemporaneous record understates the pressure on it, and the fullest account of a suppression is written after the suppressor is gone. The reason is not psychological but mechanical, and it operates in both directions. A record made *under* an order has to survive that order's readers — it will be copied, carried, possibly seized, and its authors' families live where the authors do; so what it can safely contain about the state is a lamp, not a policy. A record made *after* an order has fallen has a different job: it must explain to a community why it survived, who its martyrs were, and what it endured, and it is written by people who now need the persecution to have been legible and large.

Both records are shaped, and they are shaped in opposite directions. The practical instruction for this collection is therefore twofold. Where we find a vivid, detailed persecution narrative, the first question is *when was this written* and the second is *what did its author need it to establish*. And where we find a placid contemporaneous record under an order known to have persecuted, we must not conclude that there was nothing to write down — only that writing it down was not safe, or not useful, or not the kind of thing a legal compendium does.

The Christian archive makes the same point from the other end, and more cleanly. The account of Shapur II's persecution that the Church of the East preserved was set down in the acts of a council **convened by a Sasanian king**, praising him for reversing it. The suppression entered the record at the moment, and only at the moment, when recording it served the interest of the man who controlled the room.

Reading information and suppression against the framework

The first contribution: purity generates persecution without policy. Where an order's formation runs through purity categories — what may touch fire, what may touch earth, which day is which — and where the holders of those categories are given jurisdiction, the ordinary life of a neighbouring community becomes illegal as a routine by-product, with no decision taken by anybody. The *ḥabrā* who removes a lamp from a sick man's room is not persecuting; he is doing his job on a festival day. The consequences are continuous rather than episodic, low-grade rather than spectacular, and — the decisive property — **there is nothing to repeal**, because a purity rule is not a decree but the shape of the world for those enforcing it, and a king who revoked it would be unmaking his own order's formation. Where the corpus finds an order whose robe runs on purity rather than on doctrine, it should expect chronic friction with every minority regardless of the sovereign's intentions, and should stop looking for the edict.

The second contribution: licensing a subject record is an information instrument, not tolerance. The council of 410 gave the Church of the East a hierarchy, a head and the backing of the secular arm; it gave the crown a named counterparty answerable for millions, an organisation mapped onto its own provinces, and a body of written record it had not paid to produce. This is the same trade Module 5 found breaking in 340, rebuilt with the state's coercive power now supplying the bishop's authority rather than merely demanding his compliance. The diagnostic: **when an order suddenly organises a subject community it has been persecuting, look for what it has just failed to collect or failed to see.**

The third contribution, and the one with the widest reach: the timing rule for persecution narratives. Contemporaneous internal records understate; post-mortem records supply the narrative. Both distortions are structural and they run in opposite directions, so a persecution's true scale is generally bracketed rather than measured — the contemporary record giving a floor and the later chronicle a ceiling. This study accordingly gives the fifth-century measures as reported by Sherira and the *Seder Olam Zuta*, names them as tenth- and ninth-century compositions, and does not treat the numbers as counts.

And a confirmation carried from Module 4. The rabbis' recorded anxiety about the magi was not that they were violent but that they were persuasive — that they might draw a population the rabbis were themselves forming. The contest legible in the contemporaneous record is a contest over children, conducted between two formation apparatuses, of which only one had a state attached and neither could recruit from the other. That the one with the state attached eventually closed the other's schools, in 467, is the clearest evidence in this study that somebody in Ctesiphon finally understood the problem — and the date shows how long it took.

The discipline, restated. Kirdir's list of the struck is quoted everywhere and it is a self-assessment carved by a man being scored on it. The Talmud's cry over the lamp is real anguish and it is also a legal text making a point about divorce documents. The synod's praise of Yazdegerd is genuine gratitude and it is also written in front of his officials. None of these is a lie and none is a transcript. The method is not to pick the honest one; it is to hold all three, ask of each who produced it and what he would have been punished for writing instead, and see what survives the comparison. What survives here is an order that persecuted less systematically than its own priest claimed, more chronically than its subjects could write down, and for reasons that were mostly not about belief at all.

A note on sources. **Quoted exactly, from public-domain sources:** the opening of the Synod of Mar Isaac (410) from the *Synodicon Orientale*, in J.-B. Chabot's French translation (*Synodicon orientale, ou recueil de synodes nestoriens*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1902, pp. 253 ff.). The French above is taken from the scanned text of that edition; the scan is an optical-character reading of a 1902 print in which accents and some characters are corrupted, and the passage has accordingly been restored to standard French orthography here. Nothing has been added, removed or reordered, but a reader who needs to rely on the exact printed wording should consult the volume rather than this rendering, and the ellipsis marks an omitted clause.

Paraphrased and not quoted, with the constraint declared: all of Kirdir's inscriptions, including the list of communities struck at the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt, because every edition and translation of the Sasanian inscriptions is modern and in copyright; this constraint governs the whole study. The Talmudic passages concerning the *ḥabbarei* — the lamp taken at Gittin 16b–17a, the prohibition on lamps at Shabbat 45a, the interference with burial and slaughter at Yevamot 63b, and the interference with festivals at Beẓah 6a — are paraphrased from the reference literature rather than quoted, because Michael Rodkinson's public-domain English is abridged and non-standard and the wording of these passages could not be verified within it. This

limitation has now cost this study a quotation in three separate modules and should be understood as a standing constraint on the whole Jewish side of the evidence.

Paraphrased from modern scholarship, briefly and with credit: the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*'s treatment of the *ḥabbar/ḥabbarei* (the acts attributed to them, the dating of their appearance to the end of the first quarter of the third century, and the identification of them as Zoroastrian priests); Jacob Neusner on the incongruity between the removal of a lamp and the despair it elicits, and on the fifth-century measures; the recent Talmudic-Iranological literature — Richard Kalmin, Jason Sion Mokhtarian, Simcha Gross and others — for the reading of the rabbinic statements as hyperbolic in frequency rather than severity, for the amoraim's concern to discredit an attractive competitor, and for the current challenge to the older view that the Sasanians affected the Jews chiefly by leaving them alone; Parvaneh Pourshariati on the uncertain relation between Kirdir's declarations and their implementation; and Encyclopaedia Iranica on Yazdegerd II's religious policy, on the exilarchate, and on Isaac of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and the synod of 410. Sprengling's and Boyce's translations of Kirdir, which underlie the versions circulating online, are named here and not used.

Dates and figures, with their disputes attached. Kirdir's Kaʿba-ye Zardošt inscription is dated to roughly the 280s. The prohibition on public Sabbath observance is placed in 455 and the closure of the schools in 467 or 468; the execution of the exilarch under Peroz is given by Sherira as 470 and by others as 471. The reading of *nāṣrāyē* and *kristyān* as native Aramaic-speaking and deported Greek-speaking Christians is the common interpretation and is not certain; the underlying Middle Persian forms are themselves disputed, and Neusner records the manuscript reading as N'ČR'Y against Sprengling's rendering "Nasoreans." No figures are given here for the Isfahan reprisal, since the tradition supplies none that can be checked.

This module's own weak links. The three archives are not symmetrical and it would be easy to over-read the symmetry. Kirdir's inscriptions are contemporaneous, official and self-serving; the Talmud is contemporaneous, internal and not written as history; the *Synodicon* is official, licensed and preserved through a single late manuscript tradition. They do not cover the same decades evenly — Kirdir is third-century, the synod fifth, the fifth-century Jewish persecutions known chiefly from tenth-century chronicles — and the module's argument that they can be read against each other is stronger for the third and fifth centuries than for the fourth and sixth. The claim that the crown's information about the alluvium came principally through community intermediaries is an inference from the absence of any Zoroastrian parish structure there, not from positive evidence about how the administration gathered information; the Sasanian administrative apparatus of seals, bullae and provincial

officers is real and substantial and this module has not examined it, which is a genuine gap. And the central contribution — that purity formation generates persecution as a by-product — is this study's structural reading of what the Talmud records the *ḥabbarei* doing, and would be strengthened or damaged by a systematic examination of the Pahlavi purity literature that this module has not attempted.

MODULE 8

Another King from the House of Cabades

Module 8 · Elite Coordination & the Default — one family holding the heads of all three estates, a bridge built to face the founder's investiture, a king who could not compel his own officer, and the eleven years in which a ledger was turned negative for every group that had standing and means

What is being tracked

Durable hierarchies are not held together by loyalty, agreement or affection. They are held together because the arrangement has been set up so that each member's defence of his own position is, without his intending it, a defence of the whole. Nobody coordinates. Nobody has to like anybody. A man protects what he has, and in protecting it he protects the structure that gives it to him.

That is the Default, and the reason it matters is that it explains both the durability and the failure. An arrangement that has it can absorb enormous strain, because attacking the structure means attacking oneself. An arrangement that loses it fails fast, and the failure comes from a specific place: **from a group that has standing and means, and that has stopped finding the arrangement worth defending.** Not from the man priced in Module 5, who has neither standing nor means and whose compliance was settled by other arithmetic entirely. This module is about the arrangement *inside* the hierarchy.

The Sasanian case is unusually good for this, because the arrangement lasted three hundred and sixty-six years, broke in a single decade, and the sequence of acts that broke it is on the record with names attached.

What the arrangement offered

Module 2 established the founding terms: the great Parthian houses kept their lands, their retinues and their hereditary claims on office, and paid in recognition. That was the floor. What accumulated on top of it over the following centuries is the thing that made the Default work, and the clearest specimen of it is a single man.

Mihr-Narseh was *wuzurg framadār* — grand vizier — under Yazdegerd I, Bahram V and Yazdegerd II, and on Encyclopaedia Iranica's account under Peroz as well: four

reigns, spanning most of the fifth century. He came from one of the great houses, though which one is itself disputed and the disagreement is instructive; Iranica's article on the office calls him a scion of the Esfandiyars, while Pourshariati and others place him in the House of Suren.

His three sons held these offices simultaneously. Zurvandad was chief *herbad* of the empire — the head of the priestly estate. Mahgushnasp was *wāstaryōšān sālār*, chief of the husbandmen, which meant that he administered the land tax. Kardar was *artēštārān sālār*, chief of the warriors, a rank which Ṭabarī reckoned above that of *spāhbed*.

Stop and look at that. Module 2 found a settlement asserting a fourfold division of society as immemorial and immutable, with rank and legal standing following from birth into one of the estates. In the fifth century the heads of the three senior estates were three brothers, and their father ran the government. The estate doctrine, presented as the shape of the world, was operating as one household's portfolio.

Two further details complete the picture of what such a family thought it was.

Ṭabarī gives Mihr-Narseh's genealogy back to Vishtaspa, the Kayanian king of the Avesta — the same patent Module 2 found the seven houses claiming — but with a difference: the Arsacid king is also named in the line. He was paying in both currencies at once, the legendary and the dynastic, and the second of them was the currency of the house the Sasanians had overthrown.

And he built a bridge. It stands at Tang-e Āb near Firuzabad, with an inscription recording that it was built at his order, and Encyclopaedia Iranica's judgement on the siting is worth having exactly as scholarship: Mihr-Narseh must have chosen that spot deliberately in order to rival Ardashir's investiture relief, since there are more convenient points at which to cross the river. A grandee put his own inscribed monument opposite the founder's investiture, at a less convenient crossing, on purpose.

That is not a servant. And the Ispahbudhan, the house that will end this module, were described in the tradition as kin and partners of the Sasanians — they held the command of the West, and a sister of Vistahm married Hormizd IV and bore the future Khosrow II. The great houses were not subjects of the dynasty. They were shareholders in it.

Why they defended it without coordinating

Now the mechanism, and it should be built out of each house's position rather than out of anybody's sentiment.

A great house held land and a following that no king had granted and no king could easily take. Against that base, what did the arrangement supply that the house could not supply itself?

An arbitrator. There were seven of them, in permanent competition, with adjacent territories and private armies. Some institution had to stand above them or they would be at each other continuously.

Imperial office. A house's local power became imperial power only when the crown conferred a command, a governorship or a ministry on its head. Mihr-Narseh's family did not own the chief priesthood, the land tax and the warriors; it was *given* them. Local wealth converts into empire-wide standing only through a throne.

The estate scheme itself. A house's rank was not merely wealth; it was position within a doctrine of society that Module 2 found the crown and the priesthood jointly maintaining and Module 4 found installed in children before they could question it. Remove the crown and the doctrine loses its underwriter.

A frontier. Somebody had to hold Rome on the far side of the Euphrates and the steppe on the far side of the Gorgan Wall, and that required a scale of coordination no single house could reach.

Now run the calculation from inside any one house. Its position depends on all four of those. All four depend on there being a King of Kings. Therefore defending its own position means defending the offices, the doctrine, the arbitration and the throne that confers them — and it means, crucially, defending them against the *other six houses*, each of which would take its share if it could.

Nothing in that requires coordination and nothing in it requires goodwill. The Mihran and the Ispahbudhan had no reason to like each other and the record suggests they did not. Each simply protected what it had, and the sum of seven such defences was the arrangement.

But the sharper observation is what the calculation looks like at the other end. **Abolishing the throne was the one move no house could make**, because a house that destroyed the King of Kings would find itself the following morning facing six rivals with no arbitrator, no source of office and no doctrine — a seven-way war it would probably lose. The Default here was not held by the benefit of the arrangement so much as by the cost of its absence. That distinction matters and the closing section returns to it.

The king's view of the same arrangement

From the throne, the Default looked like a constraint, and four centuries of royal policy can be read as an attempt to get out from under it.

Ardashir and Shapur installed their own sons as kings of provinces rather than leaving the vassal kingships with other families — Module 2's re-staffing. Narseh, contesting the throne at the end of the third century, had the names of the nobles who supported him carved at Paikuli; this study paraphrases that inscription under its standing constraint, but the structural fact needs no quotation. **A king who publishes the list of magnates who backed him is admitting that he needed a coalition**, and that the throne was something a man arrived at by assembling one.

Kavad I used the Mazdakite movement against his own nobility, and the reference literature's judgement is that the episode ended with a large segment of the traditional nobility liquidated. Whatever else Mazdak was, from the throne he was a lever.

Then Khosrow I, whose reforms Modules 5 and 6 met from the fiscal side and which can now be read for what they were actually for. The land survey removed the nobility's role as intermediaries in the assessment. The salaried cavalry removed the crown's dependence on other men's retinues. A new class of small landowners, the *dehqāns*, was created between the nobility and the peasantry — a stratum whose entire position depended on the crown and which owed nothing to the seven. And the supreme military command was broken up: the single *Ērān-spāhbed* was replaced by four regional *spāhbeds*, one for each quarter of the realm, each answerable directly to the king; the frontier commanders, the *marzbāns*, were likewise to take their orders from the king directly. That reform was doubted by earlier scholarship as a literary invention until a series of seals turned up naming eight *spāhbeds* from the reigns of Khosrow I and Hormizd IV, which settled it.

Taken together that is a century-long, coherent, well-designed attempt to buy the crown out of the founding settlement. Encyclopaedia Iranica's verdict on it is exact and worth carrying: the system enjoyed moderate success for a few decades, until the difficulties besetting the monarchy exposed its weaknesses — and the high nobility was a more serious problem than the cavalrymen.

And the four-*spāhbed* reform in particular deserves a harder look than it usually gets, because the framework can say something about it that the standard accounts do not. **Splitting a dangerous office does not divide the power behind it. It multiplies the number of men who can use it.** Before the reform there was one general who could command the whole army, which is one man capable of a decisive revolt. After it there were four regional commanders, each with a quarter of the army, each with a direct line to the throne and a direct grievance when the throne disappointed him. The maximum size of a rebellion went down; the number of possible rebellions went up. That is a real trade and not a solution, and within two reigns the empire would discover which side of it had been bought.

Another king from the house of Cabades

The Default's operating rule can be read off a single sentence, and Procopius supplies it. He was writing within a few years of the events, from the Roman side, with no stake in Persian dynastic argument. H. B. Dewing's translation is public domain.

Khosrow I had come to the throne in 531. Procopius reports what happened next:

> *Chosroes, the son of Cabades, was a man of an unruly turn of mind and strangely fond of innovations. For this reason he himself was always full of excitement and alarms, and he was an unfailing cause of similar feelings in all others. All, therefore, who were men of action among the Persians, in vexation at his administration, were purposing to establish over themselves another king from the house of Cabades.*

Another king from the house of Cabades. That is the Default stated with perfect economy by an outsider who was not trying to state it. The men of action were vexed; they wanted a different occupant; and the different occupant had to be from the same house. Not one of them proposed to take the throne himself, and not one proposed to do without it. They settled on Zames, Khosrow's brother, who was barred by the rule that no man with a bodily disfigurement could be king, and worked around the rule by planning to crown Zames's young son and let Zames govern as guardian.

The plot was discovered, and Procopius's account of the response is equally useful:

> *For Chosroes slew Zames himself and all his own brothers and those of Zames together with all their male offspring, and also all the Persian notables who had either begun or taken part in any way in the plot against him. Among these was Aspebedes, the brother of Chosroes' mother.*

Then comes the detail that shows the constraint from the other direction. One child, Zames's son Kavad, was being brought up in the household of the *chanaranges* Adergoudounbades, a great officer. Khosrow wanted the boy dead and sent word to the *chanaranges* to kill him himself — and Procopius explains why he did it that way: *he neither thought it well to shew mistrust, nor yet had he power to compel him.*

A King of Kings, at the height of his reign, having just executed his own brothers and a swathe of the nobility, **had not the power to compel one of his great officers**, and had to ask him to do it as a favour. The officer disobeyed, hid the child, and reported him dead. That is the Default described from the throne's side, by a hostile foreign historian who had no reason to invent it, and it is the single most economical statement in this study of what the Sasanian monarchy actually was.

Two further things follow from Procopius's account.

First, Khosrow's father Kavad had feared exactly this. Procopius reports that as his death approached Kavad became anxious lest the Persians should attempt to overthrow his house, and that it was for this reason that he sought to have Khosrow adopted by the Roman emperor — an extraordinary manoeuvre, seeking a foreign guarantee of a domestic succession. A dynasty that asks its enemy to underwrite its own inheritance has told you what it thinks its nobility is capable of.

Second, note who Aspebedes was: Khosrow's mother's brother, and the head of the Ispahbudhan. Sixty years later it would be the Ispahbudhan again — Vistahm and Vinduyih — who made and unmade kings. The house that Khosrow decapitated in 531 was still standing, still holding the command of the West, and still married into the dynasty, in 590. **Killing the men did not touch the arrangement**, because the arrangement was not the men. It was the land, the retinue, the hereditary claim and the office, and those descended.

The eleven years

Now the fracture, and the framework's prediction can be tested against a dated sequence.

The prediction is that a hierarchy fractures where a group with standing and means stops finding the arrangement worth defending. Hormizd IV reigned from 579 to 590, and the record of what he did reads like a deliberate experiment in producing exactly that condition.

He distrusted the nobility and the clergy and treated both harshly. He killed a great many Zoroastrian priests, including the *mowbed* himself. He declined the priesthood's requests to persecute the Christians — which means he broke with both parties to the founding settlement of Module 2, the sword's partner and the seam's, in the same reign. He reduced the pay of the military by ten per cent. And he killed, by name, leading men of the great houses: Bozorgmehr, the Karenid who had been his father's grand vizier, and Bozorgmehr's brother Simah-i Burzin; the Mihranid Izadgushasp; the *spāhbed* Bahram-i Mah Adhar; and Shapur of the Ispahbudhan, who was the father of Vistahm and Vinduyih and the brother-in-law of the king himself. Then he stripped his most successful general, Bahram Chobin of the Mihran, of his commands.

Read that list as a ledger rather than as a chronicle of tyranny. In eleven years Hormizd IV took a leading man from the Karen, a leading man from the Mihran, the head of the Ispahbudhan, the chief of the priesthood, and a tenth off the pay of every soldier in the empire. There was no group in the empire with standing and means whose account he had not debited.

The framework says the arrangement should fracture. In 589 it fractured, and it fractured twice at once — which is where the module's central distinction comes from.

The Ispahbudhan attacked the king and preserved the arrangement. Vistahm and Vinduyih made a palace coup, blinded Hormizd and had him killed, and crowned his son Khosrow II — who was their own nephew, since their sister was his mother. That is the Default working precisely as designed under maximum strain. A house with standing and means removed an occupant who had stopped paying and installed one who would, and did not touch the structure by which the house held its standing. It is Procopius's sentence again, sixty years on: another king from the house of Sasan.

Bahram Chobin attacked the arrangement. He rebelled, took Ctesiphon, and claimed the throne itself as Bahram VI, on the ground that the Arsacid empire was the more rightful one — and the specialist literature marks this precisely: it was the first time in Sasanian history that a Parthian dynast challenged the legitimacy of the Sasanian family as such. He identified himself with the promised saviour of the Zoroastrian faith, which is the robe of Modules 3 and 4 being turned around and pointed at its owner. The Landscape's four-thrones argument arrives here at last. The Parthian claim, which survived Hormozdgan because Ardashir took one seat of a family that held several, waited three hundred and sixty-six years and then made its bid.

And the two rebellions came out differently, which is the evidence that matters. Bahram Chobin held the throne for about a year and lost it. Khosrow II, restored with a Byzantine army, defeated him at Blarathon; Bahram fled east and was assassinated. The Ispahbudhan's candidate sat on the throne for thirty-seven years. **In 590 the arrangement would still remove a king and would not abolish the dynasty.**

But the distinction did not survive the decade. Within a few years Vistahm rebelled on his own account and ruled the entire Iranian east independently for something between five and ten years; the remnants of Bahram Chobin's troops joined him; Bahram's brother Mardansina joined him; and Bahram's sister Gordiya married him. The house that had saved the dynasty in 590 was in armed secession by 595, allied to the house that had tried to replace it. Once the ledger has gone negative for everyone at once, the difference between removing the occupant and attacking the arrangement is a matter of a few years.

What followed — the war of 602 to 628, Khosrow II's deposition and killing by his own nobility, and the rapid succession of short-lived rulers that ended the dynasty — belongs to Module 10, which will have to establish whether the collapse ran through these same families. This module's contribution is to establish that by 600 the Default was gone, and to date its going.

Reading the Default against the framework

The first contribution, and it refines the framework's central proposition about durable hierarchies. The standard formulation is that a durable arrangement is one in which each member's defence of his own position defends the whole, so that the structure is held up by self-interest without coordination. This case shows that self-interest can hold an arrangement two different ways, and that the two have very different strengths.

A member may defend the arrangement because **it pays him** — offices, rank, access. Or he may defend it because **its absence would cost him more than he could bear** — because if the apex vanished he would face his peers with no arbitrator. The seven houses had both, but it was the second that did the work, and the evidence is that they went on defending the throne through reigns that were plainly not paying them. The refinement: **the strongest Defaults are held by mutual deterrence among the members rather than by shared benefit, and the apex's real function in such a system is to be the arbitrator whose removal nobody can survive.**

That yields a diagnostic worth applying across the corpus. Ask of each member: *if the apex vanished tomorrow, what would happen to him?* Where the answer is "he would immediately have to fight the other members," the Default will hold under extraordinary strain and will look like loyalty. Where the answer is "he would simply keep what he has," it will not hold at all, however loudly loyalty is professed. And it predicts the failure mode too: an arrangement held by mutual deterrence fails not when the members stop being paid but when enough of them are debited *simultaneously* that they can combine — which is exactly what Hormizd IV achieved.

The second contribution: splitting a dangerous office is a trade, not a fix. Khosrow I replaced one *Ērān-spāhbed* with four regional commanders answering directly to him, removing the single chokepoint through which one man could command the whole army. The maximum size of a revolt fell; the number of men positioned to raise one rose fourfold. Two reigns later the empire's most dangerous rebel was a regional commander who had been stripped of his command, and his rival was another regional commander who held the West. **Splitting an office reduces the magnitude of the worst case and increases its frequency** — and an order performing the operation should know which of those it is buying, because the two failure modes need entirely different defences.

The third contribution: the fracture is arithmetic and it is legible in advance. Hormizd IV's eleven years give the cleanest sequence this collection has yet found. A tenth off the pay. The chief priest killed. One leading man from the Karen, one from the Mihran, the head of the Ispahbudhan. The framework predicts fracture where a

group with standing and means ceases to find the arrangement worth defending; Hormizd produced that condition in every such group at once, and the fracture arrived within a year of the last debit. **The Default is not a mood or a culture; it is a ledger, and where the entries are recorded the break can be dated before it happens.**

And a distinction that survives the case. A Default in good order produces coups **against occupants**; a broken one produces challenges **to the arrangement**. In 590 both occurred within months of each other, and their outcomes measured the state of the structure exactly: the Ispahbudhan removed a king and crowned a Sasanian and won; Bahram Chobin claimed the throne for the Arsacids and lost. Five years later the two were allied by marriage and in arms together. That sequence — coup, usurpation, defeat of the usurpation, then merger — is the profile of an arrangement that was still functioning when it was struck and had stopped functioning by the time it recovered.

The discipline, restated. None of the men in this module needs to be a villain for the account to work, and the account is worse for that rather than better. Mihr-Narseh serving four kings and placing his sons at the head of three estates was doing what any capable man in his seat would do. Khosrow I killing his brothers and his uncle was responding to a real plot with the only instrument a king in that position had. Hormizd IV attacking the nobility and the clergy was attempting, less skilfully, exactly what his father and grandfather had attempted with the survey and the four commands — to get the crown out from under a settlement made in 224 by men who needed cavalry that week. Each of them weighed a benefit against a credible cost with the materials in front of him. The sum of those reasonable calculations was an empire that spent four centuries unable to compel its own officers, and then, in eleven years, gave every one of them a reason to stop pretending.

A note on sources. **Quoted exactly, from public-domain sources:** Procopius, *History of the Wars*, Book I, chapter xxiii, on Khosrow I's unpopularity and the plot to replace him with another king from the house of Kavad, and on his killing of Zames, his brothers, their male offspring and the notables involved including Aspebedes; and Book I, chapter xi, on Kavad's fear that the Persians would overthrow his house at his death. The remark that Khosrow neither thought it well to show mistrust of the *chanaranges* nor had power to compel him is from the same chapter and is summarised rather than quoted at length. All in H. B. Dewing's translation (Loeb Classical Library, 1914), from the Project Gutenberg text; Dewing's volumes I–III are public domain because the copyright has lapsed. Procopius is a Roman writing about the enemy court, and his characterisation of Khosrow's temperament is polemic; the structural facts used here — that the plotters sought a replacement from the same house, that the purge extended to the notables and to the king's own maternal uncle, and that the king lacked

the power to compel a great officer — are of a kind he had no evident motive to invent and which the Iranian evidence independently supports.

Paraphrased and not quoted, with the constraint declared: all Sasanian royal inscriptions, including Narseh's at Paikuli with its list of supporters, and the seals and bullae naming the four regional *spāhbeds*; every edition and translation of this material is modern and in copyright, and the constraint governs the whole study. The Firuzabad bridge inscription of Mihr-Narseh is likewise paraphrased, from Henning's reading as reported in the reference literature. The *Hazār Dādestān*'s notice that Bahram V sent Mihr-Narseh into servitude at two named fires is paraphrased from Encyclopaedia Iranica, for the reasons given in Modules 2 and 6.

Paraphrased from modern scholarship, briefly and with credit: Encyclopaedia Iranica throughout — on Mehr-Narseh (his tenure under four kings, his descent traced to Vishtaspa with the Arsacid king in the line, and his disgrace under Bahram V), on the office of *framadār*, on Sasanian bridges (including the judgement that the Firuzabad bridge was sited deliberately to rival Ardashir's investiture relief), and on Khosrow I's reforms (the replacement of the single *Ērān-spāhbed* by four *spāhbeds* each answerable directly to the king, the *marzbāns* reporting directly, and the verdict that the system enjoyed moderate success for a few decades and that the high nobility was a more serious problem than the cavalrymen); Ṭabarī, at second hand through Nöldeke and the Iranica articles, for Mihr-Narseh's three sons and their offices and for the ranking of *artēštārān sālār* above *spāhbed*; Parvaneh Pourshariati for the Sasanian–Parthian confederacy thesis and for the Ispahbudhan's standing as kin and partners of the Sasanians; A. Sh. Shahbazi and M. R. Shayegan for Bahram Chobin, and specifically for the judgement that his revolt was the first occasion on which a Parthian dynast challenged Sasanian legitimacy as such; and the specialist literature on the seals confirming the four-*spāhbed* division.

Names, dates and disputes. Mihr-Narseh's house is genuinely contested: Iranica's *framadār* article makes him an Esfandiyar, while Pourshariati and the literature following her place him in the House of Suren; the module's argument does not depend on which is right, but the disagreement is a fair warning about how firmly the seven houses' membership can be known. Vistahm's revolt is dated 590/1–596 by some authorities and 594/5–600 by others, and both ranges are given. The phrase describing the Ispahbudhan as kin and partners of the Sasanians is Pourshariati's rendering of the tradition and is reported here as such rather than as a verified primary quotation. Bahram Chobin's reign is 590–591. Hormizd IV's reduction of military pay is given in the literature as ten per cent, on the authority of the Arabic and Persian historians

drawing on the lost court chronicle, which is to say from the account of the dynasty that his killers' candidate went on to head.

This module's own weak links. The narrative of Hormizd IV's reign — the killings, the pay cut, the treatment of the clergy — comes overwhelmingly through sources derived from the *Xwadāy-nāmag*, that is, from a court chronicle maintained under his son and successor, who was placed on the throne by the men who murdered him. A regime that has just killed a king has every reason for that king to have been intolerable, and the list of his victims is exactly what such a regime would compile. The module's argument survives this, because the *outcome* is independently attested and because the specific victims are corroborated by their families' subsequent conduct, but the tidy ledger should be read as the successor's ledger. Pourshariati's confederacy thesis, which underlies much of the framing here, is contested; this module has used the concrete institutional evidence — offices, seals, marriages, revolts — rather than adopting the thesis wholesale, but a reader who rejects it entirely would read the same facts as a strong monarchy with a turbulent aristocracy rather than as a partnership, and the difference would matter to Module 10. And the reading of the four-*spāhbed* reform as a trade between magnitude and frequency of revolt is this study's structural argument; the sources report the reform and report the revolts, and the connection between them is drawn here.

MODULE 9

Except That of the Sovereign

Module 9 · Plurality or Foreclosure — a competent judiciary with no ceiling above it, a charter granted to Christians because a king was fighting his own nobility, a charter taken by Armenians with cavalry during a succession crisis, and a decree given to the commons that vanished with the hand that held it

The question, put precisely

There is a state apparatus. The question is whether anybody had protection *from* it.

Not whether the laws were good, not whether the judges were honest, not whether the king said just things about justice. Whether a subject facing the apparatus had anything to stand behind: a court that would rule against the crown, a right of petition that had to be heard, an assembly that could meet without leave, speech that could not be punished, a jurisdiction the state's officers could not enter.

And where such protections exist, the framework makes a specific claim about their origin that this module exists to test. **The peasant did not create them.** Protections are won by factions *inside* the hierarchy, bargaining from strength, at moments when the apex or a rival faction wants something badly enough to pay for it and can survive paying. Those bargains leave residue, and residue accretes. So the instruction is: wherever somebody below the nobility gets let "in," look for the factional fight it fell out of. And look, equally, for what was lost, and how.

The Sasanian case answers all of this unusually cleanly, because it contains one charter granted to a subject community, one charter taken by force, and one grant to the commons that disappeared without trace — three different mechanisms, three different outcomes, all documented.

Where the ceiling was

Start by conceding what should be conceded, because the usual account of this empire gets it wrong in the easy direction.

The Sasanians had a serious legal system. Judges were drawn from the priestly estate, jurisprudence had become an independent discipline by the end of the period, and one law book survives — the *Hazār Dādestān*, a compilation of a thousand judgements — which treats property, marriage, inheritance, trusteeship and endowment purely as

legal questions without a word of theology anywhere near them. And the quality of the working judiciary is attested by a hostile witness. Ammianus Marcellinus, a Roman officer who fought these people and wrote about them with contempt, nevertheless recorded this, in Charles Duke Yonge's public-domain translation of 1862:

> *But as those only are appointed judges who are men of proved experience and uprightness, and of such wisdom as to stand in no need of advice, they laugh at our custom of sometimes appointing men of eloquence and skill in public jurisprudence as guides to ignorant judges.*

A Roman conceding that the Persians laughed at Roman judicial practice, and had grounds to. That is not nothing, and any account of this order that treats it as lawless is wrong.

Now the ceiling. Encyclopaedia Iranica's description of the judicial hierarchy, drawn from the Dēnkard and the law book, is exact and it settles the module's central question. The most momentous laws were promulgated by decree of the King of Kings. Next to the king, the *mōbedān mōbed*, the chief priest, was considered infallible and his decisions conclusive; he could confirm or overrule any decision **except that of the sovereign**; and his rulings carried more force than the verdict of ordeal.

Read the structure. A competent judiciary at the working level. Above it a chief priest who can overturn any judge. Above him a king whom nobody can overturn, and whose decree is itself the highest source of law.

That is an appeal chain with no exit. There is a great deal of protection *within* the apparatus — a man with a property dispute or an inheritance claim had real recourse — and there is none whatever *from* it once the crown has taken an interest. And at the bottom the position is worse than neutral, because Ammianus also records, in the same chapter, that some Persian laws were abominable in that for the crime of one man they condemned all his relations. A subject faced a competent court, an unappealable summit, and collective liability.

So the answer to the module's question, stated before the evidence rather than after it: **there was no general liberty in the Sasanian empire.** What there were, at particular times and for particular named bodies, were licences, immunities and charters. Every one of them can be traced to a moment when somebody with standing and means had leverage. The rest of this module traces three of them.

The charter granted: a king who needed a third party

The framework says that if anyone below the nobility gets let "in," there is a factional fight behind it. Module 7 established what happened in 410; this module establishes why.

Yazdegerd I reigned from 399 to 420, and the Iranian tradition hated him. Encyclopaedia Iranica summarises what Ṭabarī and the sources dependent on the Sasanian chronicle say of him: he misused his sharp intelligence and fine education; he was suspicious and selfish and contemptuous; he punished the slightest failure harshly and expected gratitude for the pettiest favour; he would tolerate no opposition to his word or will; he never listened to advice **except when it came from foreign envoys**; and he prevented those around him from forming close friendships with each other. When he consolidated his power he belittled the nobility and shed so much blood that his subjects prayed for God to end his tyranny. His epithet in the Arabic sources is *al-āthim*, the Sinner.

Nöldeke's judgement on that verdict, which Iranica carries, is the whole point: it reflects the feelings of the priests and the nobility. Yazdegerd executed Zoroastrian priests who objected to his handling of the religious minorities. He was, in the plainest terms, a king at war with both parties to the founding settlement of Module 2 — the sword's partner and the seam's — simultaneously.

And in the eleventh year of that reign he convoked forty bishops at his own capital and gave the Christians of his empire a constitution: a single recognised head, a hierarchy organised on metropolitan lines, the right to hold synods, a position for the catholicos at court, and the secular arm behind the catholicos against those who defied him.

Set the two facts side by side and the mechanism is unmistakable. A king locked in a fight with his nobility and his clergy acquired a third constituency by chartering it. The Christians of the alluvium — the taxpayers of Module 5, the people Module 4 found the crown had declined to form — did not win this. They did not fight for it, petition for it, or negotiate it. It fell on them as fallout from a factional struggle they were not party to, and they were so unprepared for it that they compared the man to Cyrus.

Now the residue, which is where the finding is.

The weapon failed for its wielder. The nobility killed Yazdegerd in the northeast in 420 and then tried to keep his sons off the throne, killing his eldest, Shapur IV, shortly after his accession. Bahram V came to power with the backing of the priesthood and the Surenid Mihr-Narseh, and began his reign with a systematic persecution of the Christians at their urging. The factional purpose of the charter was dead within a year of the man who made it.

The charter was not. The catholicosate survived. Synods went on being held. The Church of the East went on producing its own law, its own schools — Module 4's School of Nisibis was founded seventy years later — and its own records, the very *Synodicon* from which we know about 410. It outlived Bahram V's persecution, Yazdegerd II's, Peroz's, the war of 602–628, and the empire itself, continuing under the caliphate with the catholicos still at the capital.

A concession made as a weapon in one reign had become, within two decades, an institution nobody could conveniently unmake.

The charter taken: cavalry in a succession crisis

The second case is the armed version, and it is the framework's model prediction fulfilled almost to the letter.

Yazdegerd II's religious policy in Armenia produced the revolt that ended at Avarayr in 451, where the Armenians under Vardan Mamikonian were beaten in the field. That is the point at which most accounts of a failed rising stop. What actually followed was thirty-three years of guerrilla resistance under Vardan's nephew Vahan, which the empire could not finish.

Then the leverage arrived from outside. In 484 Peroz was killed with his army by the Hephthalites on the eastern frontier — the catastrophe Module 10 will have to account for. His successor Balash inherited a broken empire, an unfinished Armenian insurgency, and a rival claimant named Zarir. He needed cavalry, and there was cavalry in Armenia that had been fighting his family for a generation.

The terms agreed at Nvarsak read like a charter because that is what they are:

All existing fire-altars in Armenia to be destroyed, and no new ones constructed. Christians in Armenia to have freedom of worship, and conversions to Zoroastrianism to be stopped. No land to be allotted to those who convert to Zoroastrianism. The King of Kings to administer Armenia in person rather than through deputies. The privileges of the *nakharars* restored, the Mamikonian estates returned, and Vahan himself made *hazarapet* and afterwards *marzbān* of Armenia.

And the consideration on the other side: Vahan sent Armenian cavalry against Zarir, and they were decisive in destroying him.

Every element the framework specifies is present and datable. A faction with standing and means — great lords with land, retinues and a thirty-three-year record of not being beaten. Leverage created by a crisis at the apex, not by anything the faction did. A concession the crown would much rather not have made and could survive making. And an exchange: liberties for cavalry, at a moment when cavalry was worth more than fire-altars.

Two observations sharpen it.

First, note who the charter was actually with. It was not a grant of liberty to Armenians. It was a settlement with the *nakharars*, and the clauses that name beneficiaries name them: their privileges, their estates, their man as governor. The Armenian cultivator received freedom of worship as a by-product of his lords' bargain, exactly as the framework predicts, and it is worth being clear that this is not a cynical reading — the liberty was real, and he had it, and he had it because somebody with cavalry wanted something else.

Second, the same population took the same liberty by force again at the next opening, which shows what maintained it. Joshua the Stylite, writing in Syriac in 507 and translated by William Wright in 1882, describes what happened when Kavad demanded money from the emperor Anastasius and was refused:

> *When the Armenians who were under the rule of Kawad heard that he had not received a peaceful answer from the Romans, they took courage and strengthened themselves, and destroyed the fire-temples that had been built by the Persians in their land, and massacred the magi who were among them. Kawad sent against them a general with an army to chastise them and make them return to the worship of fire; but they fought with him, and destroyed both him and his army.*

They took courage and strengthened themselves. A charter is not self-enforcing. What kept the Armenian settlement alive across the sixth century was not the document but the standing capacity of the men who had signed it to do that again whenever the crown was busy elsewhere.

The grant that left nothing behind

The third case is the one that produced no residue at all, and the comparison is the module's contribution.

Kavad I inherited a weakened throne, a nobility that had recently executed a king-maker of its own and would shortly depose him, and a fiscal position wrecked by his father's eastern disaster. He supported Mazdak.

What the commons got is reported, with wildly varying degrees of hostility, in Greek, Syriac and later Islamic sources. Royal granaries were opened for distribution, principally those of the well-to-do. Land was temporarily reallocated from magnates to peasants. And — the item that scandalised everyone who wrote about it — Encyclopaedia Iranica states flatly that the law legalising the community of women propounded by Mazdak was **decreed by Kavad I**, citing Joshua the Stylite. Joshua, contemporary and hostile, describes it thus in Wright's translation:

> *he had reestablished the abominable sect of the magi which is called that of the Zaradushtakan, (which teaches that women should be in common, and that every one could sleep with whom he pleases)*

and adds, a few lines later, the sentence that gives the game away:

> *The nobles too of his kingdom hated him, because he had allowed their wives to commit adultery.*

The sources need careful handling here and the module will not pretend otherwise. The Greco-Roman and Islamic accounts sensationalise; modern scholarship reads the "community of women" less as licence than as an assault on aristocratic hoarding of women in harems, breaking the exclusive lineage system so that poor men could marry. Patricia Crone has argued that the Mazdakite revolt is substantially a historiographical construct and that elite factionalism was the real driver; Touraj Daryaee reads it as a genuine radical movement that Kavad used to move land from magnates to the crown. This study does not adjudicate.

Because the structural point survives every version. **Whatever the commons received, they received it as a royal decree aimed at the nobility, and it was reversed within a reign.** Khosrow I, as crown prince, arranged a disputation at which Zoroastrian priests and Christian bishops argued against Mazdak; Mazdak was declared defeated; and the massacre followed. Iranica's phrasing is worth carrying for its own sake: Mazdak and his followers were put to the sword at the verdict of an inquisitorial scrutiny. A judicial form was wrapped around a purge, which is what a legal system with no ceiling is for.

And nothing remained. No office, no endowment, no recognised leadership, no archive. The Khurramite movements of the Islamic centuries carried something of the ideas forward, but nothing carried forward inside the Sasanian order, because there was nothing institutional to carry.

Now set the three cases side by side, because together they yield a rule.

The **Christians** got a charter from a king who needed a counterweight. It survived him by two centuries. The **Armenian nobility** took a charter with cavalry during a succession crisis. It survived, maintained by the same cavalry. The **commons** got a decree from a king who needed a battering ram. It survived him by nothing.

The difference is not the generosity of the grant, the number of beneficiaries, or the sincerity of the grantor. **A concession accretes into durable residue if and only if it creates an institution that can outlive the fight it came from.** The Church of the East got a head, a hierarchy, synods, property and records — a body with a name, a treasury and a memory, which could assert the grant after everyone who made it was

dead. The *nakharars* already had one: estates, retinues and a lineage that could enforce the clause militarily. The commons got a redistribution, which is a transfer rather than an institution, and a transfer can be transferred back.

The diagnostic follows directly and should travel to every other case in this collection. To predict whether a liberty will last, do not ask how many it benefits or how nobly it is phrased. Ask **whether it builds something with officers, an income and a record.** Where it does, the grant will outlive its purpose; where it does not, it will not outlive its grantor.

What was lost, and how

The reverse direction is as informative, and this order supplies four losses.

The Mazdakite decrees, reversed under Khosrow I as described — lost because they had no institutional carrier and because the group they had been used against recovered its position.

The Jewish exilarchate. An office of recognised self-government, dealing with the crown on behalf of Babylonian Jewry from the third century, and the counterparty to the arrangement Module 5 traced through Samuel's rulings. It was suspended during the persecutions under Peroz — the exilarch Huna V executed in 470 or 471, the office standing vacant. It was restored. Mar Zutra II's armed independence at Mahoza ended with his execution. And on the tradition it was finally ended by Khosrow II's execution of the exilarch Haninai, after which Jewish self-government is reported to have halted for over fifty years. Module 7's timing rule applies to all of this: the record comes from tenth- and ninth-century chronicles, written under a later empire.

The public Sabbath, prohibited in 455, and **the Jewish schools**, closed in 467 or 468, as Module 7 set out.

And, inside the hierarchy, the nobility's own immunities, taken back by Khosrow I: the tax intermediation removed by the land survey, the retinue's leverage reduced by the salaried cavalry, the supreme command broken into four. That is the crown clawing back residue from the strongest faction in the empire, and it is a reminder that the accretion runs both ways.

The pattern across the four losses is consistent and worth stating. **A liberty is lost at the moment its sponsor cannot enforce it.** The Armenians kept theirs because they could fight, in 484 and again around 502. The Christians kept theirs because the institution survived and because there was a Christian empire across the frontier with a treaty interest in the question — the settlement of 562 obliged Persia to guarantee freedom of worship to its Christian subjects, which converted a domestic licence into an international obligation. The Jews lost theirs at precisely the point where neither

condition held: no armed sponsor, no foreign patron, and an office whose usefulness to the crown had lapsed.

Speech, assembly, petition

Three short answers, given plainly rather than manufactured.

Speech. No protection is attested. Ammianus records that the most stringent Persian laws were those against ingratitude and against deserters, and that a man's relations could be condemned for his crime. An order that punishes ingratitude as a serious offence has told you what it thinks of criticism.

Assembly. It existed as a licence, not a right, and the licence is documented. Encyclopaedia Iranica's description of the 410 synod is that it was held *with the permission of the Sasanian king* — forty bishops assembled at the capital because the King of Kings convoked them. The right to hold synods was among the things the charter granted, which means that before the charter there was no such right, and that it was a possession of the chartered body rather than of persons.

Petition. This study has found no evidence of an institutionalised right of petition or appeal against the crown. The later Islamic *maẓālim* jurisdiction is sometimes given a Sasanian ancestry, and the Iranian tradition is full of just-king anecdotes in which a wronged subject reaches the throne, but those are ninth-century and later materials in a genre designed to teach kings, and the framework's rule about robes applies to them. This module will not build on them.

Reading liberty against the framework

The first contribution: residue requires an institution. Three concessions, three fates. A charter to a body that acquired officers, synods, property and archives outlived its grantor by two centuries and its empire by more. A charter to a lineage that already had estates and cavalry was maintained by that cavalry across a century. A decree redistributing goods to an undifferentiated mass vanished with the king who issued it. **A concession accretes into durable liberty if and only if it creates something with a name, an income and a memory** — an entity capable of asserting the grant when everyone who made it is dead. The test to apply elsewhere in the corpus is not the breadth of a liberty but its *carrier*, and it explains why so many generous-sounding grants in history left no trace while narrow ones to corporate bodies became constitutions.

The second contribution: the ceiling, not the courts. The Sasanian judiciary was competent and, on hostile testimony, honest; jurisprudence was a developed discipline

with a thousand-judgement casebook. And there was no liberty at all, because the appeal chain terminated in a chief priest who could overrule everyone but the king and a king whom nobody could overrule. **Protection from an apparatus is a function of where the appeal chain ends, not of the quality of its lower courts.** An order can therefore possess excellent justice and no liberty simultaneously — which is the commonest arrangement in the historical record and the one most often misread in both directions, by admirers who mistake good courts for freedom and by detractors who mistake the absence of freedom for lawlessness.

Confirmation of the framework's sourcing rule, without exception. Not one protection in this empire originated below the nobility. The Christians received theirs from a king fighting his own aristocracy and clergy. The Armenian lords took theirs with cavalry at a succession crisis. The Jews held theirs by administrative convenience and lost it when the convenience lapsed. The commons received a decree as a weapon and lost it when the weapon was put down. In four centuries there is no instance of a protection created from below, and the module has looked for one.

And a note that Module 10 will need. The two liberties that survived to 651 were held by bodies with their own leadership, property and records — the catholicosate and the Armenian settlement — and both outlived the empire itself. Which means that what the Arab armies found in the alluvium was a population organised by an institution the Sasanian crown had chartered, two centuries earlier, as a weapon against its own nobility, and which by then answered to nobody in Ctesiphon at all.

The discipline, restated. The temptation in a module like this is to find liberty where there was none, because the sources contain generous-sounding words, or to deny that anything real existed because the structure was authoritarian. Both are wrong here. The Armenians genuinely had freedom of worship after 484 and it was written into clauses. The Church of the East genuinely had its own hierarchy, courts and schools. These were real protections, really held, and people really lived better for them. They were also, every one of them, the residue of a fight among men with cavalry and offices, and none of them was ever available to a person simply because he was a person. That is not a lesser kind of liberty. It is the only kind this order produced, and naming its origin does not diminish what it was worth to those who had it.

A note on sources. **Quoted exactly, from public-domain sources:** Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* 23.6, on the appointment of Persian judges and their view of Roman judicial practice, in Charles Duke Yonge's translation (Bohn's Classical Library, 1862), from the Project Gutenberg text. The Chronicle attributed to Joshua the Stylite, composed in Syriac in 507, on Kavad's re-establishment of the sect teaching that women should be in common, on the nobles' hatred of him for it, and on the

Armenians destroying the fire-temples and defeating the army sent against them, in William Wright's translation (Cambridge, 1882), from the digitised text at Tertullian.org. Joshua is a Christian writing in Roman Edessa about the enemy king, and his account of the Mazdakite decree is hostile testimony from outside; it is used here for the fact of the decree, which is independently reported, and not for its characterisation.

Paraphrased and not quoted, with the constraint declared: the *Hazār Dādestān* and the Dēnkard throughout, for the structure of the judicial hierarchy — the promulgation of the most momentous laws by royal decree, the chief priest's power to confirm or overrule any decision except the sovereign's, and the force of his rulings against the verdict of ordeal. This study does not quote the Sasanian legal literature for the reasons set out in Modules 2 and 6, and the cost of that constraint falls heavily on this module, whose central finding about the appeal chain rests entirely on the reference literature's rendering of passages it cannot reproduce. The terms of the Treaty of Nvarsak are given as reported in the reference literature; no public-domain text of the treaty has been located and the Armenian historians who preserve the tradition, Łazar Pʿarpecʿi and Ełišē, exist in modern English translations that are in copyright.

Paraphrased from modern scholarship, briefly and with credit: Encyclopaedia Iranica throughout — on the Parthian and Sasanian judicial systems, on Yazdegerd I (including Ṭabarī's catalogue of his sins and Nöldeke's judgement that the verdict reflects the feelings of the priests and the nobility), on the exilarchate, on Yazdegerd II, and on Isaac of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and the synod held with the king's permission; R. N. Frye for the clauses of the Nvarsak treaty; Patricia Crone for the argument that the Mazdakite revolt is largely a historiographical construct driven by elite factionalism, and Touraj Daryaee for the contrary reading of it as a genuine movement leveraged by Kavad; and the standard literature on Bahram V's accession with priestly and Surenid backing and on the persecution that followed.

Dates and disputes. Avarayr is 451; Vahan Mamikonian's resistance runs from 481 to 484 in the narrower reckoning and from Avarayr onward in the broader; Peroz's death and the Nvarsak treaty are both 484. Kavad's first reign is 488–496, his restoration 498 or 499, and the suppression of Mazdak is placed variously around 524 and 528. The execution of the exilarch Huna V is given by Sherira as 470 and by others as 471. The end of the exilarchate under Khosrow II and the reported halt of Jewish self-government for over fifty years rest on the later chronicles and are given as reported, under the timing rule set out in Module 7.

This module's own weak links. The finding about the appeal chain — that the chief priest could overrule any judgement but the king's — carries most of the module's

weight and comes from a single reference-work rendering of passages in the Dēnkard and the law book that this study cannot read directly; a reader who wants to test it must go to Macuch and Perikhanian. The Mazdakite episode is the worst-sourced thing in this study: there are no Sasanian records, the Greek and Syriac accounts are hostile and contemporary, the Islamic accounts are late and moralising, and one serious scholar holds that the popular movement is substantially an artefact of the sources. The module's argument is built to survive that — it needs only that the commons' gains came by royal decree and were reversed by royal decree, which every version reports — but a reader who follows Crone entirely would say the commons were never a party at all, which would strengthen rather than weaken the framework's sourcing rule while removing the case. The claim that no protection in this empire originated below the nobility is an argument from absence across four centuries of thin evidence. And the treatment of the 562 treaty's worship guarantee as a factor sustaining Christian liberty is an inference; the clause is attested, its enforcement is not.

MODULE 10

To Protect Their Own Property

Module 10 · Change & Collapse — twenty-six years of total war, a river that moved in 628, a plague that took half the western provinces, fourteen kings in four years, and a defence of the empire's richest province conducted by men defending their estates

What is being tested

The framework's account of change is unsentimental and this module exists to test it against a case, not to illustrate it.

Structural change does not come from below. A functioning state apparatus crushes an unorganised rising however angry and however numerous, because a durable order is an armed settlement and a settlement of the armed is altered only by the armed. Change comes from the hierarchy side, and it comes in four ways: the elite **fractures** and one faction arms the people against the other; the elite **exhausts** its floor in great-power war and must reprice; the elite is **conquered** by a rival hierarchy; or the elite **overbreeds**, seating fewer claimants than it produces, until its surplus turns counter-elite and leads the crowd as fuel. The common man is present at every opening — as soldier, as crowd, as the weight one broken faction swings — and is the proximate agent of none of it. His pressure is a real cause, working through the standing cost of the settlement; it is never the hand that cracks the floor.

The Sasanian ending is an unusually good test because three of the four cracks occur in sequence inside thirty years and can be separated, dated and traced to named men. And because this study has spent nine modules identifying, in advance, which men they would be.

The exhaustion

The war of 602 to 628 was the longest and most destructive conflict the two empires ever fought, and its peculiarity is that the Sasanians won it first.

Khosrow II, restored in 591 by Byzantine arms, used the murder of his patron Maurice as the pretext for a war that took Syria, Palestine and Egypt, captured Jerusalem in 614, and brought a Persian army to the shore opposite Constantinople in 626. At its height the empire held more territory than at any time since Shapur II. Then Heraclius went round it — into the Caucasus, into the Iranian heartland — and

broke the Sasanian field army at Nineveh in December 627, and in early 628 took and sacked the royal residence at Dastgird, a few days' march from Ctesiphon.

Twenty-six years of total war between the only two organised states in western Asia, fought to the exhaustion of both. Everything Module 6 traced — the land survey, the salaried cavalry, the treaty gold from Constantinople, the accumulated treasure — went into it, and the treaty gold went first, since the war had begun by ending the arrangement that produced it.

It is worth registering how visible this was from outside. The war was a subject of discussion and wagering in Mecca, and the Byzantine defeat and predicted recovery are the occasion of the opening verses of the thirtieth sura of the Qur'an — a contemporary Arabian text taking the measure of the two empires while the third party to the story was forming. This study does not quote it, because the public-domain English renderings available here could not be verified against their printed editions, but the structural fact needs no quotation: the exhaustion of both empires was legible to the people who would inherit them, as it happened.

The note called

Now the metabolic accounting, and the Landscape's prediction arrives on a date.

Module 5 and Module 6 established that the alluvium's productivity was manufactured rather than natural: canal systems at a scale no village could build, the Nahrawan a sixth-century creation, the Diyala reaching its recorded settlement maximum in the Sasanian phase. The Landscape flagged the consequence in advance — coordination and intensive agriculture lift a population above what the land will carry unaided, and a disruption calls the note.

Around 628 the Tigris shifted dramatically, and the environmental literature's judgement is that the shift turned sections of the Diyala floodplain from prime agricultural land into desert, weakening the Sasanians at a critical phase of the Byzantine war. The Islamic historian al-Balādhurī attributes the end of Khosrow Parviz's reign to that great flood; the reported consequences are deaths, destroyed crops, famine, displacement and plague.

And the plague came. The epidemic remembered as the Plague of Sheroe swept the western provinces in 628; the tradition reports that half the population died, including the reigning king.

The figures are chroniclers' figures and this study does not treat "half the population" as a count. What matters is the structure of the compounding, and it deserves stating precisely, because it is the module's first contribution.

Each of the three shocks was individually survivable. Empires recover from lost wars; rivers had shifted before; plagues had come before. What made this combination terminal is that **the repair for each shock required exactly what the other two had removed.** A shifted river and broken dikes need corvée labour and central coordination — the labour the plague had killed and the coordination the war had bankrupted. A lost war needs revenue to rebuild an army — the revenue the flood had just drowned. And a plague needs food and order — which the flood and the war had taken.

So the refinement the framework should carry: **a metabolic debt is not merely a vulnerability but a vulnerability that becomes unrepairable precisely when the other cracks open**, because canal maintenance is among the first things a state under military and fiscal stress stops doing, and the ecological damage then compounds while nobody is in a position to arrest it. The diagnostic is not the size of any single shock but **the interval between shocks measured against the order's repair time.** A single crack is usually survivable; what ends an order is a second crack arriving before the first has closed.

The fracture, and it ran through the named families

On 25 February 628 Khosrow II was seized at Ctesiphon and imprisoned; three days later he was executed on his son's order, after watching his sons killed in front of him. The son took the throne as Kavad II.

The coalition that did it is a roll-call, and it should be read against Module 8 rather than as a list of unfamiliar names.

Farrukh Hormizd, the Ispahbudhan *spahbed*, with his sons **Rostam Farrokhzad** and **Farrukhzad**. The Ispahbudhan — the house Procopius watched Khosrow I decapitate in 531 when he killed his own maternal uncle Aspebedes; the house whose brothers Vistahm and Vinduyih blinded Hormizd IV in 590 and put this very Khosrow II on the throne; the house described in the tradition as kin and partners of the Sasanians. **The family that made him king unmade him thirty-eight years later.**

Shahrbaraz, of the House of Mihran — the house of Bahram Chobin, who had claimed the throne for the Arsacids in 590 and lost it.

Varaztirots II Bagratuni, representing the Armenian faction — the *nakharars* of Module 9, who had extracted their charter at Nvarsak in 484 and were still a bloc.

And **Kanadbak** of the Kanārangīyān.

Every one of these is a house this study identified in the Landscape or in Module 8 as a group with standing and means. The fracture ran through exactly the fault lines the arrangement had been built along in 224.

What followed is the clearest illustration of elite fracture the corpus is likely to find. Kavad II ordered the execution of all his brothers and half-brothers, including the designated heir, thereby destroying the dynasty's own succession pool; made peace with Heraclius, surrendering every conquest, the prisoners, an indemnity and the True Cross; and died of the plague within months. The reference literature's counts of what followed vary — fourteen rulers in four years on one reckoning, thirteen over fourteen years on another — and the variance is itself informative: the throne changed hands too often for the chroniclers to agree.

The army split into three, each part under a faction leader. Two blocs consolidated: the **Pahlav**, the Parthian houses under Farrukh Hormizd the Ispahbudhan, and the **Parsig**, the Persian faction under Piruz Khosrow, with a third Nimruzi grouping and Shahrbaraz's own following.

The sequence is worth setting down because of what it shows about where authority had gone. Kavad II's seven- or eight-year-old son Ardashir III was installed and killed two years later by Shahrbaraz, who seized Ctesiphon and ruled forty days before being murdered by Farrukh Hormizd, who installed Khosrow II's daughter Boran. Boran was deposed; her sister Azarmidokht had Farrukh Hormizd killed with the help of Siyavakhsh, who was Bahram Chobin's grandson; Rostam Farrokhzad killed Azarmidokht in turn and restored Boran; and Piruz Khosrow strangled Boran. Then Rostam and Piruz — the leaders of the two blocs, and, the sources say, **threatened by their own men** — agreed to work together, and crowned an eight-year-old grandson of Khosrow II as Yazdegerd III in June 632.

Two observations close the study's long arc.

The first is Khodadad Rezakhani's judgement, and this study adopts it because nine modules of evidence point the same way: by 632 the Sasanian state resembled the feudal system of the Parthian Empire at its collapse in 224. **The order had reverted to the shape of the thing Ardashir overthrew.** The Landscape found an apex vested in a lineage holding several seats rather than in a single office; Module 1 found that killing one holder did not acquire the rest; Module 2 found a settlement that bought recognition and left the houses' material base untouched; Module 8 found the Default that arrangement produced and dated its break to Hormizd IV's eleven years. Here the Parthian problem, four centuries after Hormozdgan, finishes the sentence it started.

The second is where Yazdegerd III was crowned: the temple of Anahid at Istakhr, where he had been hiding through the civil war — the same fire whose hereditary wardenship, on Ṭabarī's account, had been the office of Sasan, and to which Ardashir had sent the heads of the provincial kings who would not lay down their crowns. Four

hundred and eight years, one fire, from the founder's family's first office to the last king's coronation. The choice was made, the sources say, as a symbol of rejuvenation.

The conquest

The Arabs arrived at an order that had been at war for twenty-six years, had lost half the population of its richest provinces to plague, had watched its tax base drown, and had spent four years killing its own kings.

And the single most revealing sentence about the last decade is Encyclopaedia Iranica's description of who actually defended the Sawad after the succession crisis ended: the defence was largely undertaken by members of the royal family and members of the Persian high nobility **to protect their own property**.

That is the terminal state of the Default expressed in a clause. Module 8 established that the arrangement worked because each house's defence of its own position was, without anyone intending it, a defence of the whole. By the 630s the two had come apart. Men were defending estates, and the estates happened to lie in the empire's path. There was no longer a structure whose defence their self-interest implied, because there was no longer a structure — only fourteen dead kings and two factions that had just agreed to stop strangling each other.

The battle at Qadisiyyah — conventionally 636, though Pourshariati has argued from numismatic evidence for 634 or 635 — was commanded by Rostam Farrokhzad, the Ispahbudhan, *spahbed* of the northwestern quarter, son of the man who had made and unmade three monarchs. He was killed and the army broke. The specialist estimate is that no more than about twelve thousand Arabs and thirty thousand Iranians were engaged; only that the Persians outnumbered the invaders can be safely asserted.

Then the two details that finish the argument.

Some four thousand Iranian soldiers — the Ḥamrāʾ — joined the Muslim army at Qadisiyyah, shared equally in the booty, and fought in the subsequent campaign. Professional cavalry, changing employers on equal terms, at the battle.

And local notables assisted the victors; Iranica names Bestām, the *dehqān* of Bors. The *dehqāns* were Khosrow I's own creation, the small-landowning stratum invented in Module 8 to be a counterweight to the great houses, dependent on the crown and owing nothing to the seven. They kept their land and became the local administrative class of the caliphate.

Ctesiphon fell in 637. The remaining field army was destroyed at Nahavand in 642. Yazdegerd III fled east and was killed at Merv in 651, reportedly by a miller — which is the only moment in this entire collapse at which a common man determines anything, and what he determines is the disposal of a fugitive's purse.

Where were the people?

This is the module's central test, and the honest answer requires refusing two temptations.

The first temptation is the triumphalist one: that the oppressed populations of Mesopotamia welcomed the conquerors and threw off the Persian yoke. The general literature does attribute the speed of the conquests partly to feeble resistance from local populations, and there is something in it. But the "welcoming" narrative is a later construction that served several parties, and this study has no good evidence of what the Aramaic-speaking cultivators of the Sawad actually did.

The second temptation is the opposite one: to claim that the population's four centuries of grievance were a cause of the collapse. They were not. The framework's claim, tested here, is that a functioning apparatus crushes a rising however angry and however many, and that the common man is never the proximate agent. Nothing in this collapse contradicts it. There was no peasant rising in the Sawad. There was no urban insurrection at Ctesiphon. There was no Aramaean movement, no Christian revolt, no Jewish army in the field.

What the evidence supports is narrower and, for this study, more damning than either version. **The people of the province that paid for everything neither defended the order nor overthrew it. They were not a party to either operation.**

And that is Module 4's prediction arriving, in the negative form the framework predicts it must. Module 4 found the crown declining — by constitution rather than by choice, because its priesthood was a closed caste and its social scheme rested on the line between *ēr* and *anēr* — to form the population of its richest province, and found that field filled instead by Jewish academies taking children at six or seven and Christian schools with written statutes. Module 5 found the price of that arrangement presented in 340, when the state needed to reach the Christians and had nothing to reach them with but a bishop who refused. Module 9 found the residue: the institutions the crown had chartered as weapons against its own nobility.

Four centuries of formation withheld did not produce a rebellion. It produced **an absence** — a population with no reason to fight for the arrangement and no capacity to fight against it, which is exactly the condition the framework predicts and exactly the condition that makes a conquest cheap.

The test of that reading is what survived. The Church of the East continued under the caliphate with its catholicos at the capital, its schools, its property and its law. The Babylonian academies continued and the exilarchate was restored. The *dehqāns* kept their land and their function. The Zoroastrian state church — the institution with the crown's whole support, the doctrinal monopoly of Module 2, the courts, the estate

doctrine — did not survive the crown that held it up. The fire temples became mosques; the Pahlavi books were compiled two centuries later by a shrinking community explaining what had been lost.

Reading change against the framework

The first contribution: the cracks compound, and the interval is the variable. The framework names four ways a floor cracks. This case has three of them inside thirty years and shows that they are not alternatives but a sequence in which each disables the repair of the last. Exhaustion (602–628) created the conditions for fracture; fracture (628–632) dissolved the command structure and the fiscal apparatus; and the dissolved apparatus made conquest (633–651) possible against a force that none of the three alone would have admitted. Meanwhile the ecological shock of 628 could not be repaired because repairing it required the corvée the plague had killed and the coordination the war had spent. **What ends an order is not the magnitude of a shock but the arrival of a second shock inside the repair time of the first**, and the diagnostic is accordingly the interval, not the blow.

The second contribution, on the metabolic side. The framework's grim accounting holds that coordination and intensive agriculture lift a population above natural carrying capacity and that a disruption calls the note. This case adds the mechanism by which the note becomes uncollectable rather than merely due: **the debt is engineered so that its service requires the very capacities that a crisis removes.** Canal maintenance needs labour and central direction; a state losing a war and fighting a civil war stops directing, and a plague removes the labour. The Sasanian crown's greatest investment — the sixth-century canal expansion that carried the Diyala to its maximum — was therefore also the largest hostage it had given to fortune, and the ransom fell due in the one decade it could not pay.

Confirmation of the framework's central claim, in the strongest form this collection has produced. Every agent of change in this collapse is named, and every one of them is from the hierarchy: Farrukh Hormizd of the Ispahbudhan, his sons Rostam and Farrukhzad, Shahrbaraz of the Mihran, Piruz Khosrow of the Parsig, Kanadbak, Varaztirots the Armenian, Siyavakhsh grandson of Bahram Chobin, and Kavad II who killed his father and his brothers. The common man appears exactly twice in four decades of structural transformation: as the unpaid infantry Ammianus described three centuries earlier, walking behind the cavalry, and as a miller at Merv in 651 who is said to have killed a fugitive for what he was carrying. Neither is agency, and the second is not even politics.

And a fourth finding, which links back to Module 9 and may be the most useful thing in this study. What outlived the empire was not the empire's own institutions but the ones it had chartered as weapons against its own nobility. Yazdegerd I created the catholicosate in 410 because he was at war with his priests and his magnates and needed a third constituency; it was functioning in Baghdad centuries after his dynasty was extinct. The Zoroastrian church, which held a state-granted monopoly on doctrine and the courts from 224, went down with the state that granted it. **An institution granted a monopoly by a state shares that state's fate; an institution chartered as a counterweight outlives it — because it was built, from the first day, to survive a fight.**

And one honest note about the counter-elite. Elite Chaos's fourth crack — overproduction, the surplus elite that turns counter-elite and leads the crowd — is the one this module has not found in the Sasanian case, and it should say so rather than manufacture it. There is no Sasanian Robespierre. The nearest candidates are Mani in the third century and Mazdak in the sixth, and both were suppressed by an apparatus that was still functioning, exactly as the framework predicts a rising against an intact floor should be. What arrived instead was a counter-elite from outside — an Arabian leadership with its own organisation, formation and programme, walking into a floor that three other cracks had already opened. Which is the third crack, conquest, and not the fourth.

The discipline, restated. It would be easy to write this ending as a judgement — a cruel order collapsing under the weight of its own injustice, the neglected province declining to save it. The evidence does not support the moral shape of that sentence and this study will not impose it. The men who broke the Sasanian order were not its victims but its principal beneficiaries: the great houses, defending positions that had become worth more to them than the structure that had conferred them. The population that did not defend it was not taking revenge; it was doing what a population with no stake and no organisation always does, which is nothing. And the arrangement that fell had, for four centuries, kept the water running, the silver good and the interior mostly quiet. What this module establishes is only the mechanism: that an order which withholds formation buys an indifferent province, that an order which leaves its coordinating class's base intact buys a permanent counter-elite, and that when the shocks come close enough together, an order pays both bills at once.

A note on sources. **Quoted exactly, from public-domain sources:** none. This module rests on scholarship, and the absence of a primary quotation is itself the point: the last decades of the Sasanian order are known through Arabic historians drawing on a lost court chronicle, through Armenian and Syriac chronicles, and through

numismatics and archaeology, and the modern editions and translations of all of them are in copyright. The opening verses of the thirtieth sura of the Qur'an are a genuinely contemporary Arabian witness to the war of 602–628 and are referred to but not quoted, because the public-domain English renderings (Sale, 1734; Rodwell, 1861; Palmer, 1880) could not be verified against their printed editions within this study's constraints.

Paraphrased and not quoted, with the constraint declared: the Sasanian royal inscriptions and coinage throughout, per this study's standing constraint; and Ṭabarī's narrative of the interregnum, used at second hand through Nöldeke and the reference literature.

Paraphrased from modern scholarship, briefly and with credit: Encyclopaedia Iranica, above all its article on the Arab conquest of Iran, for the defence of the Sawād being undertaken by the royal family and the high nobility to protect their own property, for the four thousand Ḥamrāʾ who joined the Muslim army at Qadisiyyah and shared equally in the booty, and for local notables such as Bestām the *dehqān* of Bors assisting the victors; Iranica's article on the battle of Qadisiyyah for the engagement's contested chronology and for the estimate that no more than twelve thousand Arabs and thirty thousand Iranians fought; Parvaneh Pourshariati for the Pahlav–Parsig factional analysis, for the identification of the coalition that overthrew Khosrow II, and for the argument from numismatic evidence that Sasanian administration suffered a severe blow in 634 or 635; A. Sh. Shahbazi for the Plague of Sheroe and the account of the interregnum; Khodadad Rezakhani for the judgement that by 632 the Sasanian state resembled the Parthian Empire at its collapse in 224; Edmund Burke III's environmental history for the Tigris shift of around 628 and its effect on the Diyala floodplain, and al-Balādhurī, at second hand, for the attribution of the end of Khosrow's reign to the flood; and Robert McC. Adams for the Diyala settlement sequence throughout.

Dates, figures and disputes. The count of rulers between 628 and 632 is given in the literature as fourteen in four years and as thirteen over fourteen years; both are reported here and neither is adopted. Qadisiyyah is conventionally dated 636 or 637; Pourshariati argues for 634 or 635 and the question is open. The claim that half the population of the western provinces died in the Plague of Sheroe is a chronicler's proportion and is given as reported, not as an estimate. Ctesiphon falls in 637, Nahavand in 642, and Yazdegerd III is killed at Merv in 651; the story that his killer was a miller is traditional and is given as such. Kavad II's execution of his brothers is variously reported; one tradition has eighteen of Khosrow's sons killed in front of him.

This module's own weak links. Pourshariati's reading of the collapse as the dissolution of a Sasanian–Parthian confederacy carries a great deal of this module's structure, and it is contested; a reader who rejects it would read the same events as a strong monarchy destroyed by an exceptionally destructive war, a plague and an ecological catastrophe, with the factional civil war as a symptom rather than a cause. This study has leaned on the concrete evidence — the named coalition of 628, the offices those men held, the marriages, the sequence of murders — rather than adopting the thesis wholesale, but the framing is hers and the acknowledgement is owed. The narrative of the interregnum comes almost entirely through sources derived from the lost court chronicle, compiled under successors, and the tidy factional scheme may be tidier than the events. The characterisation of the Sawad's population as neither defending nor opposing the order is an argument from silence across a badly documented decade, and the "feeble local resistance" judgement in the general literature is drawn largely from the Islamic conquest narratives, which had their own reasons to report populations submitting readily. And the environmental argument rests on a small number of studies of a river shift whose date, extent and consequences are less precisely established than this module's use of it might suggest; a reader who thinks the 628 flood a minor event would lose the metabolic contribution and keep the rest.

MODULE 11

The Immortal Soul

Module 11 · The Grim Accounting — four hundred and twenty-seven years in sword and in metabolic debt, a category of violence that leaves no bodies to count, a note called in 628 and still being serviced six centuries later, and the king who killed his brothers and is remembered as the Just

What is being counted, and what cannot be

An armed group took power in the spring of 224, held it, and ended in 651. Four hundred and twenty-seven years. This module accounts for that span.

Two ledgers. The **sword**: the killing, the deportation and the bondage that the order carried out, suffered, and made possible. And the **metabolic**: the debt incurred when coordination and intensive agriculture lift a population above what the land will carry unaided, which a disruption calls in, and which is paid in famine and disease.

And then a third thing, which is not a ledger but belongs here: the forgetting. After enough time an arrangement stops being remembered as something violence made and becomes simply the way the world is — and this case supplies the clearest specimen of that operation the collection has met, because it can be watched happening twice, to two different empires, on the same ground.

One discipline first. **This module will not produce a total.** There are no reliable casualty figures for any event in this study. The numbers that exist come from chroniclers with reasons, from martyrologies written to edify, from court histories composed under successors, and from Roman authors who had never counted a Persian army. Where figures exist they are given with their provenance and their disputes attached. Where they do not, the module says so. A grim accounting that manufactures a sum is not an accounting; it is a rhetorical device.

The sword: the founding

Module 1 established what the founding cost, from the dynasty's own devotional literature rather than from its enemies.

A thousand Kurds killed in a night attack and the survivors wounded or enslaved, their king and his family deported to Fars. The fortress of the lord of the Worm stormed, everything destroyed, the survivors going into bondage, the place razed. The seven children of Mitrok son of Anoshepat killed on Ardashir's order, of whom the

text says one three-year-old girl survived by being hidden. The Parthian chief secretary Dād-windād run through with a lance and shown being run through, by name, on a cliff face at Firuzabad. The provincial kings who would not lay down their crowns suppressed, and their heads sent to the temple of Anahid at Istakhr.

And the founding legend's own admission, which is the honest summary of the whole period: whenever one frontier was restored to order, another rose in perfidy and unsubmission.

The sword: four centuries of the same three hundred miles

The largest column in this ledger has no numbers in it at all, and its size has to be estimated from its duration.

From the 230s to 628, the Sasanian and Roman empires fought over the same ground — upper Mesopotamia, Armenia, the Caucasus passes — with intervals of peace that were understood by both sides as intervals. Shapur I destroyed three Roman armies and captured an emperor; sacked Antioch twice; and carried off populations. Julian invaded in 363 and his army came out broken and his successor ceded Nisibis. Shapur II fought Rome for forty years and took Amida in 359. Kavad took Amida again in 503. Khosrow I came west in 540 and worked through the Syrian cities at prices set by what each could raise, which Module 6 set out. And the last war ran twenty-six years, from 602 to 628, and reached from Egypt to the walls of Constantinople and back to Dastgird.

No casualty figure for any of this can be given. What can be given is the shape: **two organised states, each capable of fielding armies in the tens of thousands, contesting a single corridor for four hundred years**, with the population of that corridor — the Armenians, the Mesopotamians, the Arabs of the desert margin — as the permanent theatre. Nobody counted them, and the sources that survive are interested in emperors.

The eastern frontier is the same story with a shorter record. The Hunnic wars of the fifth century produced the largest fortification systems in the region, at Darband and along the Gorgan Wall, and cost a king his life and his army in 484. Joshua the Stylite, in William Wright's public-domain translation of 1882, gives the humiliating detail of the earlier episode, when Peroz had been captured and had to buy his life:

> *He promised in his pride that he would give for the safety of his life thirty mules laden with silver coin; and he sent to his country over which he ruled, but he could hardly collect twenty loads, for by his former wars he had completely emptied the treasury.*

Ten mule-loads short. That is what four centuries of frontier war looks like from the treasury's side, half a century before the end.

The sword: inside the house

The dynasty's own losses are better documented than anybody else's, because the dynasty's own losses were what the chroniclers cared about.

In 531 Khosrow I, on discovering a plot to replace him, killed — on Procopius's account, quoted in Module 8 — his brother Zames, all his own brothers, all of Zames's brothers, all their male offspring, and the Persian notables involved, including his own mother's brother.

In the 580s Hormizd IV killed the chief priest and a great many priests, and one leading man from each of the great houses: the Karenid Bozorgmehr and his brother, the Mihranid Izadgushasp, the *spāhbed* Bahram-i Mah Adhar, and Shapur of the Ispahbudhan, who was his own brother-in-law.

In 590 Hormizd was blinded and killed; a Mihranid took the throne and lost it and was assassinated in exile; the Ispahbudhan brothers who had crowned Khosrow II went into secession against him and were destroyed.

In 628 Khosrow II watched his sons killed in front of him — eighteen of them, on one tradition — and was then executed himself; and Kavad II, having ordered the deaths of all his brothers and half-brothers including the designated heir, died of plague within months. Then fourteen rulers in four years, most of them murdered, several of them children.

Note what that record shows about the arrangement rather than about the men. **This dynasty destroyed its own succession pool twice**, in 531 and again in 628, and on the second occasion there was nothing left but an eight-year-old hiding in a fire temple. The Default of Module 8 was expensive to maintain and the price was paid in royal blood as well as in noble blood, because a king who could not compel his officers could only survive by killing his relatives.

The sword: the confessions

The confessional violence was episodic and reign-specific rather than continuous, and its figures are the least trustworthy in the study.

Mani died in confinement in 274 or 277; his church was persecuted afterwards and its next leader killed in 286 or 291. Kirdir's inscriptions claim Jews, Buddhists, Brahmins, Nazoraeans, Christians, Baptisers and Manichaeans struck down

throughout the empire, and Module 7 established that this is a self-scored career summary whose relation to implementation is unclear.

Shapur II's persecution ran, on the Christian reckoning, for forty years. Shemʿon bar Ṣabbaʿe was executed on a Good Friday placed in 341, 344 or 345, and the numbers killed with him are given as about a hundred, as 1,150, and by Sozomen as sixteen thousand — three figures spanning two orders of magnitude, from sources with an interest in the largest.

Avarayr in 451 has casualty figures in the Armenian tradition of roughly 3,544 Persian and 1,036 Armenian dead, and the reader should notice that the precision of the first number is itself a warning: nobody counted 3,544 bodies on a fifth-century battlefield.

The Jewish measures of 455 to 470 — the public Sabbath forbidden, the schools closed, leaders executed, the exilarch killed, and the Isfahan reprisal in which a large part of a city's Jewish population is reported killed and the children raised as fire-worshippers — come to us through tenth- and ninth-century chronicles, under the timing rule Module 7 established.

And Mazdak and his followers were put to the sword after a staged disputation, with the Islamic sources giving numbers in the thousands that the specialist literature treats as inflated for effect.

One structural observation belongs here, and it points back to Module 7. **The confessional violence that produced bodies was episodic; the confessional pressure that was continuous produced none.** The lamp taken from a sick man's room on a festival day, the interference with burial, the interference with slaughter — the chronic friction generated by a purity formation operating as law across four centuries — killed nobody and appears in no ledger. It is invisible to an accounting of the sword and it was, on the evidence of the Talmud's own despair, the thing the subject communities actually lived under.

The sword that leaves no bodies

There is a category here the corpus should hold separately, because every accounting that counts corpses misses it entirely.

Shapur I moved populations. After his campaigns of the 250s and 260s he deported the inhabitants of Antioch, Tarsus and Caesarea and settled them in Persis, Parthia, Khuzestan and Āsōristān, in numbers the literature puts in the tens of thousands. He founded cities to hold them — Weh-Andiok-Shapur, "Shapur's Better Antioch", and Bishapur — and put them to work on the dam at Shushtar that is still called Caesar's dyke.

Nobody died in this, comparatively speaking. Module 5 established that the deportees were treated relatively well, given cities rather than camps, employed at their trades and left their religion, because what they supplied was skill and skill cannot be beaten out of a man. The Christianity of the Iranian plateau was substantially seeded by them and Gundeshapur became a centre of learning partly on their account.

And it was still an entire city's population marched several hundred miles under guard and never permitted to go home.

Forced population transfer is a form of the sword that produces no corpses, and it is therefore invisible to every accounting that counts corpses. Worse, where the transferred are valuable it produces visibly good outcomes — cities, learning, engineering — which makes it invisible a second time, as a benefit. The ledger should hold it as its own line: not deaths, but lives relocated at spearpoint and the descendants who never knew another country. And the same applies to the slaves whose existence the Sasanian law book documents in its treatment of their sale, manumission and donation to fire foundations, and about whom this study can say almost nothing else.

The metabolic column

Now the second ledger, and here the case is unusually legible.

The premise was established in the Landscape and confirmed in Modules 5 and 6. The alluvium's productivity was manufactured, not natural. State-scale canal networks — the Nahrawan a sixth-century creation, the linked works between the rivers, the Diyala system — supported a population that the land unaided would not have supported, and Robert McC. Adams's reconnaissance places the region's recorded settlement maximum in the Sasanian phase. The empire's greatest investment was also the largest hostage it ever gave.

The note was called in a single decade and Module 10 traced how.

The Justinianic plague arrived from 541 and the literature is clear that it affected the Sasanian empire as well as the Byzantine; how severely is a live scholarly dispute, with a recent argument in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* holding that the mortality estimates rest on a small textual base and are exaggerated against the non-textual evidence. This study reports the dispute rather than picking a side.

Around 628 the Tigris shifted, and the environmental literature's judgement is that sections of the Diyala floodplain went from prime agricultural land to desert. Al-Balādhurī attributes the end of Khosrow Parviz's reign to that flood, with deaths, destroyed crops, famine, displacement and plague following.

And the Plague of Sheroe took the western provinces in 628, killing the reigning king and, on the tradition's reckoning, half the population — a chronicler's proportion, not a count.

But the metabolic accounting does not close in 651, and this is where the case adds something to the framework.

The Arab conquerors did not let the system go. Under ʻUmar the caliphate set about renewing lands flooded or neglected since the late Sasanian period, fixed the Sawad's annual revenue, and maintained the canals; under the Abbasids the Nahrawan reached its greatest extent as the water supply and breadbasket of Baghdad. The system was restored, and it worked, and it produced a second imperial capital on the same alluvium.

And then it went. From the mid-tenth century the Nahrawan was progressively destroyed and abandoned, and by the eve of the Mongol conquest the Nahrawan and Katul al-Kisrawi complexes were no longer functional. The environmental history's summary of the whole sequence is that the Arab restorations achieved significant progress for a time, and that in the end it was to no avail.

So: the note was called in 628, partially serviced for six hundred years, and finally defaulted on. That yields the module's second contribution.

A metabolic debt is not paid in a single famine. It is paid in a long decline of the ceiling, punctuated by restorations that each fall short of the previous maximum, and it is paid by populations that had no part in incurring it. The Sasanian crown dug the canals; the Abbasid caliphate serviced the debt; the peasants of medieval Iraq defaulted on it; and Adams's survey records the result as a settlement curve that peaks under the Sasanians and never returns to that line. The diagnostic that follows is not to look for the famine. It is to look for **the maximum that is never regained** — because that number, and not any single mortality figure, is the size of the note.

The forgetting

And now the last thing, which is what happens to all of the above once enough time has passed.

Take one man. Khosrow I came to the throne in 531 and, within a year or two, killed his brother Zames, all his own brothers, all of Zames's brothers, every male child of any of them, and the leading men of the plot including his own maternal uncle. That is Procopius, contemporary, quoted in Module 8. He went on to break the Mazdakites after a staged disputation and to put them to the sword. He was, on the evidence, one of the more thoroughly homicidal rulers in a study full of them.

He is remembered as **Anushirvan** — *anōšag-ruwān*, "of the immortal soul" — and as Nushirvan the Just.

His name became the Arabic word for a Persian king, *Kisrā*, as Caesar's became the word for a Roman one. The Perso-Islamic mirrors-for-princes literature, the whole genre of statecraft advice that shaped medieval Islamic political thought, is built substantially from Sasanian material with him at its centre; the circle of justice is his maxim. He is the model of good governance in the civilisation that conquered and replaced his own.

And Richard Frye recorded the forgetting caught in the act, in a sentence about the twentieth century: peasants in Iran assign any obviously pre-Islamic bridge, caravanserai or other structure to Khosrow of the immortal soul.

Now set that beside Module 3, because the two are the same operation.

The Sasanians carved their founding relief at Naqsh-e Rustam directly beneath the rock-cut tombs of Achaemenid kings, and the Iranian tradition attributed that whole landscape not to any dynasty it could name but to Jamshid — the legendary world-king, organiser of the social estates, for whom demons built palaces of stone. The city was Takht-e Jamshid, the Throne of Jamshid, and it still is.

Fourteen centuries later, Iranian villagers attribute Sasanian bridges to Khosrow.

It is the same mechanism, running one layer up, with the Sasanians now occupying the position they had put the Achaemenids in. Module 3 named the rule: continuity of site is not continuity of memory, and a monument with evident authority and a vacant attribution is not a memory but a resource, which accrues to whoever supplies the missing name. Module 11 finds it running again, on the order this study has spent eleven modules examining, and the name it has accrued belongs to the man who killed his brothers.

That is the deepest form of the forgetting and it deserves stating precisely, because it is not the form the framework's phrasing leads one to expect. The expectation is that people forget that violence made the arrangement. What actually happens is subtler and more complete. **The name survives, detached from what it did, and becomes available as an attribution for anything old and impressive.** The floor is not covered up. It is orphaned — and an orphaned floor is more thoroughly forgotten than a concealed one, because concealment requires somebody who still remembers enough to conceal.

Reading the accounting against the framework

The first contribution: the ledger needs a line for violence that leaves no bodies. Shapur I moved the population of Antioch several hundred miles and settled

them in Khuzestan, where they built a dam that still stands and founded a tradition of learning. No accounting that counts deaths registers this at all, and an accounting that registers outcomes registers it as a benefit. **Forced transfer is doubly invisible: once because it produces no corpses, and again because, where the transferred are valuable, it produces visible goods.** The corpus should hold it as its own category — lives relocated at spearpoint, and the generations who never knew another country — and should expect it to be systematically under-counted everywhere it occurs.

The second contribution: the note is serviced, not paid. The metabolic debt this order incurred by lifting the alluvium above its unaided carrying capacity was called in 628 by a river shift, a plague and a war arriving inside one decade. But it was not discharged then. The caliphate restored the system, the Abbasids raised it higher than the Sasanians had, and the default came three centuries after that, with the works derelict by the thirteenth century. **A metabolic debt is repaid across centuries in a declining ceiling, by populations that did not incur it, and the measure of its size is not any mortality figure but the maximum that is never regained.**

The third contribution, and it closes a loop this study opened in Module 3: the forgetting is recursive, and it is the same operation as the robe's manufacture. An order that has fallen leaves monuments whose authority is evident and whose attribution is vacant, and the next tradition supplies a name from whatever legendary material it has. The Sasanians did this to the Achaemenids and assigned Persepolis to Jamshid. The Persian tradition then did it to the Sasanians and assigned every old bridge to Anushirvan. In each case the supplied name is a king who has become legendary — which is to say, a king whose deeds have been forgotten thoroughly enough that his name can absorb anything. **The final state of a floor of force is not concealment but orphanage**, and the surest sign that an order has been forgotten is that its greatest killer's name has become a synonym for justice.

And the refusal. This module gives no total for the sword and no total for the metabolic column, because neither can be had. Four hundred and twenty-seven years, four centuries of frontier war over one corridor, two self-inflicted extinctions of a royal line, several episodic persecutions with figures spanning two orders of magnitude, tens of thousands transferred by force, an unknown number of slaves, one river, two plagues, and a settlement maximum never regained. That is the shape of the ledger. Anyone who offers a number for it is offering a rhetorical device, and the honest entry in the last column is *unknown*.

The discipline, restated. Setting this out is not an indictment and the sequence would be dishonest if it read as one. The same four centuries produced the canal system that fed the alluvium, silver that held its weight, an interior that mostly stayed quiet, a

legal tradition serious enough to earn a hostile Roman's respect, a school at Nisibis, a medical tradition at Gundeshapur, and a body of statecraft that the next civilisation adopted wholesale. Those are on the page too and Module 12 will have to weigh them. What this module establishes is only that the arrangement was made by violence, sustained by violence, ended in violence, ran up a debt against the land that outlived it by six hundred years — and that within a few generations of its fall the man most closely associated with it was known as the Just.

A note on sources. **Quoted exactly, from public-domain sources:** the Chronicle attributed to Joshua the Stylite, on Peroz's promise of thirty mule-loads of silver and his inability to collect twenty because his wars had emptied the treasury, in William Wright's translation (Cambridge, 1882), from the digitised text at Tertullian.org. Procopius on Khosrow I's purge of 531 is quoted in Module 8, in H. B. Dewing's public-domain Loeb translation, and is referred to here rather than requoted. The *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr ī Pābagān* material summarised in the founding section is quoted in Module 1, in Darab Dastur Peshotan Sanjana's public-domain translation of 1896.

Paraphrased and not quoted, with the constraint declared: all Sasanian royal and priestly inscriptions, including Kirdir's list of the communities struck; and the *Hazār Dādestān* on slavery and on the donation of slaves to fire foundations. This study does not quote either, per the constraint declared in Module 1 and repeated at every point of use.

Paraphrased from modern scholarship, briefly and with credit: Encyclopaedia Iranica throughout, for the deportations and their destinations, for the Sasanian legal treatment of slaves, for the persecutions and their chronology, and for the Mazdakite suppression; Richard N. Frye for the observation that Iranian peasants assign any obviously pre-Islamic structure to Khosrow of the immortal soul, and for the parallel between *Kisrā* and *Caesar*; Robert McC. Adams, *Land Behind Baghdad*, for the Diyala settlement sequence and its Sasanian maximum; Edmund Burke III's environmental history for the Tigris shift of around 628 and its effect on the Diyala floodplain, and for the judgement that the Arab restorations achieved significant progress for a time and in the end to no avail; the standard literature on the Nahrawan for its Abbasid peak and its progressive abandonment from the mid-tenth century; the reference literature on the Justinianic plague, together with the argument of Mordechai, Eisenberg and colleagues in *PNAS* (2019) that the received mortality estimates rest on a narrow textual base and are exaggerated against the non-textual evidence; and the scholarship on the Perso-Islamic mirrors-for-princes tradition and on Khosrow I's reputation in Islamic literature as Nūshirvān the Just.

Figures, all of them contested, given with their provenance. The thousand Kurds, the four thousand men and the thousand camels of the founding narrative are the *Kārnāmag*'s own round numbers in a romance. The dead with Shemʿon bar Ṣabbaʿe are given as about a hundred, as 1,150, and by Sozomen as sixteen thousand. The Avarayr figures of roughly 3,544 Persian and 1,036 Armenian dead come from the Armenian tradition and their apparent precision should be treated as a warning rather than as evidence. The eighteen sons of Khosrow II killed before him, and the "half the population" of the Plague of Sheroe, are chroniclers' figures. The deportation totals are given in the literature as "tens of thousands" without a documentary basis. No figure in this module is offered as a count.

This module's own weak links. The metabolic argument depends on Adams's Diyala chronology, on a small number of studies of the 628 river shift, and on the assumption that settlement area is a usable proxy for population — each of which is defensible and none of which is secure. A reader who thinks the 628 flood a minor event, or the Justinianic plague's Persian mortality slight, would keep the sword ledger and lose most of the second column. The claim that the chronic purity friction of Module 7 killed nobody is an argument from the absence of recorded deaths, which is exactly the kind of absence a chronic low-grade pressure would produce whether or not it was lethal. And the forgetting argument rests on Frye's ethnographic observation and on the Persepolis attribution established in Module 3; both are well attested, but the claim that they are instances of a single recurring mechanism is this study's structural reading rather than anything a source asserts.

MODULE 12

The Same Fire

Module 12 · Convergence and Divergence — reading the Sasanian order against the corpus: the same ground the Achaemenids held and the one decision that made everything downstream different; a colonial shape arriving in the third century without an ocean or a race line; the revision this case forces; and the strongest case for the defence, stated at full weight and answered

Why this case was run

This study was built as a controlled comparison. The Achaemenid empire and the Sasanian empire occupied the same ground, drew on the same populations, faced the same rivers and passes, and were founded by men from the same province speaking a related language — separated by seven hundred years and by almost nothing else that a comparative method would normally have to hold constant. Two orders, one landscape. Whatever they did alike, they did because the position permitted only so many answers. Whatever they did differently, they chose.

Twelve modules later the comparison has produced a result, and it turns on a single decision taken at the founding, in the first decade, by men who could not have known what it would cost. This module states it, sets the case against the rest of the collection, records what it confirms and complicates, makes the revision it demands, and closes on the strongest case that can be made for the whole enterprise.

What holds here as it holds everywhere

The convergences first, briefly, because they need stating before the divergences can mean anything and because they are the least interesting part of the answer.

There was a floor of force and it came first. Module 1 dated it — nineteen years from Papak's coup to Ctesiphon, three battles on a Roman senator's testimony, four months of daily fighting on the dynasty's own — and everything afterwards was written on top of that fact and after it.

There was a settlement of who got what among the armed. Module 2 read it off the terms: the great houses kept their lands, retinues and hereditary offices and paid in a ceremony; the priesthood got the courts and a doctrinal monopoly; the crowns of the provincial kings were laid down and taken up again.

There was a robe, and Module 3 found it cut for the coordinating class and the enemy rather than for the population that paid — cliffs in Fars, in Persian, Parthian and

Greek, hundreds of kilometres from the Aramaic-speaking province that produced the revenue.

There was a formation, and Module 4 found it running through the units in which ordinary life was counted rather than through anything anyone was told.

There was a cost column for the ruled, and Module 5 found exit foreclosed twice over, by statute and by irrigation.

There was extraction, and Module 6 found it sorted by caste, with the poll tax falling on precisely the estates that were not exempt from it.

There was an information regime, and Module 7 found it licensing what it could not see.

There was a Default among the elite, and Module 8 found where it broke and when.

There were liberties, and Module 9 traced every one of them to a quarrel among men who held office or cavalry.

And the order Ardashir met was itself a naturalised former conquest — the Arsacids, four hundred and seventy years in the ground, over Seleucids, over Achaemenids, over whatever the Medes were. He met the fourth layer, and every one of those layers had once been simply the way the world was.

None of that distinguishes this case. It is the ordinary condition of every order in this collection, and the fact that it holds on this ground, in this period, among these people, is one more piece of evidence for the collection's standing claim that the dynamics are not European, not modern and not colonial.

The controlled comparison, and the decision that made the difference

Now the comparison the study was built for, and it has a clean result.

Cyrus and his successors, taking the same ground, **rented** their legitimacy. They subsidised local cults: paid the Babylonian priesthood, restored the temple at Jerusalem, patronised the Egyptian gods, and let each conquered people keep its own account of why the King of Kings was rightful. The Achaemenid study named the diagnostic — does the crown pay the local clergy? — and found the answer yes, everywhere, in every idiom. The robe was outsourced.

Ardashir **bought**. Module 2 established what happened instead: the provincial kings' dynastic fires were extinguished and their endowments confiscated; one priest, Tansar, was given exclusive doctrinal authority with all competitors stripped of standing in the same act; and the courts were placed in the magi's hands. Not many sanctions subsidised into contentment, but one sanction purchased outright.

That is the decision, and the study's central comparative finding is that almost everything downstream follows from it.

Renting is cheap and transferable. A subsidised local cult costs a subsidy and generates no official falsehood, because it makes no claim outside its own city. It also transfers: a new King of Kings can pay the same priests the same money, which is a large part of why the Achaemenid empire changed hands in four years with several countries never defended at all.

Buying a monopoly is expensive and creates an official truth — and therefore, in the same act, an official falsehood in every province that holds another. Module 7 found the consequence running as chronic low-grade friction for four centuries: a purity formation given jurisdiction criminalises the neighbour's ordinary life as a by-product of its own routine operation, with nothing to repeal. Module 4 found the deeper consequence: a hereditary priesthood that reproduced by descent and next-of-kin marriage could not recruit outsiders, so the crown that bought it could not use it to form the population of its richest province, and the field was held by the formation already running. Module 5 found the invoice presented in 340, when the state needed to reach the Christians of the alluvium and had nothing to reach them with but a bishop who refused. Module 9 found the chartered institutions the crown then had to create as substitutes, and Module 10 found them outliving the empire while the state church did not.

One choice, made in the 220s or 230s about who would say what the gods wanted, predicts Modules 4, 5, 7, 9 and 10 of a study that ends in 651.

And it explains the other measurable difference between the two orders, which is the shape of their collapses. The Achaemenid empire's apex was a seat, and a seat can be assumed; Alexander took it in four years. The Sasanian apex, as the Landscape found, was inherited from a lineage that held several thrones, and Module 1 measured the cost of that: nineteen years to the capital, Hatra unreduced for sixteen more, a defeat in Armenia at the hands of the dead king's sons. Module 8 found the same structure producing four centuries of king-making and dated its break to Hormizd IV's eleven years. Module 10 found it finishing the sentence: by 632 the state had reverted, on Rezakhani's judgement, to the shape of the Parthian order Ardashir overthrew.

Cheap conquest, cheap collapse. Expensive conquest, expensive everything.

The colonial shape, arriving early and inland

The second convergence is the one this study did not expect, and it matters to the collection more than the first.

Set the Sasanian arrangement in Āsōristān beside the collection's colonial cases and the shape is the same. A population that produced most of the revenue and received almost none of the formation. A conquering order whose apparatus could not admit them without dissolving the distinction its whole social scheme rested on. Governance conducted through intermediaries the conquering order had not made — an exilarch, a catholicos — with the state's coercive power lent to those intermediaries in exchange for tax and quiet. A robe addressed to the coordinating class and the rival empire rather than to the people who paid for it. Extraction sorted by caste, with the head tax defining the stratum that bore it and the exemption list naming everyone who did not. And a collapse in which the majority province neither defended the order nor overthrew it, because four centuries of withheld formation had produced not a rebellion but an absence.

That is the shape the collection first described with an ocean, a race line and a metropole in the picture. Here it arrives in the third century AD, inside a contiguous land empire, between peoples of the same broad region, with no ocean, no race theory and no metropolitan public to deceive. Which is the strongest evidence this collection has yet produced for its own central claim: the dynamics are structural, and they are available to any order whose formation apparatus cannot take in the people it rules.

But — and this is the divergence that matters more than the convergence — **the mechanism of the withholding was different, and the difference corrects the corpus's reading.** The colonial case withheld formation as *policy*: forming Kenyans as Englishmen would have created a claim to admission and to rights, so a small administrative class was formed and the rest left alone. The Sasanian crown withheld it by *constitution*: the priesthood was a closed hereditary caste that could not recruit, and the estate doctrine rested on the line between *ēr* and *anēr* that admission would have dissolved. Nobody in Ctesiphon deliberated about whether to form the Aramaeans of the Sawad. The question could not arise.

So the framework's proposition needs stating one level up, and Module 4 stated it: **the field is left open by capacity, not by intention.** Ask of a conquering order not whether it wished to form the conquered but whether its apparatus was constitutionally able to, and the sharpest single test is whether its clergy recruits from outside itself. A closed priesthood settles the confessional future of every province the conqueror does not already hold, on the first day, regardless of what any later king decides he wants.

Where this case stands alone

Four features of this order have no close parallel in the collection so far, and they are what it contributes to the comparative record.

An apex vested in a lineage rather than an office. The Arsacids held four thrones — Parthia, Armenia, Iberia, Caucasian Albania — in a family federation, and Ardashir won one of them. Every other case in the collection has an apex that can, in principle, be assumed: a seat, a crown, a governorship. This one could not, and the study measured the difference in decades of conquest and centuries of aftermath. The framework should hold **multi-seated apex** as a category and expect, wherever it finds one, a slow conquest and a permanent counter-elite composed of the previous holders.

A sustained internal record from the governed. The Babylonian Talmud was produced continuously, inside this empire, by members of a subject community, across four centuries, beginning within five years of the conquest. Almost no other case in the collection has anything comparable, and Module 7 was able to use it to establish a rule that should travel: contemporaneous internal records understate the pressure on their authors, post-mortem records supply the narrative, and a persecution's true scale is therefore bracketed rather than measured.

A peer empire on the frontier for the whole of the order's life. The Achaemenids faced no state of comparable organisation. The Sasanians faced one from the first year to the last, and the consequences run through the study: the Greek on the trilingual inscriptions, the reclamation claim addressed to Rome and surviving mainly in Rome's archive, the Christian population converted from a fiscal asset into a security problem by a policy change in another country, the treaty gold that Module 6 found funding part of the fisc, and the twenty-six-year war that Module 10 found emptying both empires into the same grave. The SEED proposed convergence by competition as a hypothesis, and the study's answer is a qualified yes: both empires ended with confessional states, official churches and persecuted minorities, and each was a principal cause of the other's arriving there.

And a founding narrative that publishes the floor rather than concealing it. Module 1's finding, which is the study's sharpest early contribution: the *Kārnāmag* is priestly devotional literature that records its hero ordering a rival's seven children killed and his own pregnant wife executed, and the Firuzabad relief shows a named minister being impaled. Nothing is hidden. The colonial robes had to conceal because their audiences held creeds the floor would offend; this one did not, because its audience's test of a rightful king was *khwarrah* rather than legality, and slaughter is not evidence against fortune. The corpus should hold **concealing robes and sanctifying robes** as distinct species, with the audience's own creed as the selector — which sharpens rather

than weakens the colonial finding, since what the metropolitan robe was managing was never the violence but the contradiction between the violence and the metropole's account of itself.

What the case confirms, complicates and refutes

Confirms, without qualification: that the floor comes first and the robe after; that the settlement is made among the armed and the ruled are its subject matter rather than a party to it; that the recursion holds and no conqueror meets a baseline; that structural change comes from the hierarchy side and never from the ruled; that no protection from the apparatus originated below the nobility in four centuries of looking; and that legitimacy is borrowed rather than minted — here borrowed, awkwardly, from the very order the conquerors destroyed, since both the Kayanian patent and the Achaemenid claim on Rome were already in circulation before Ardashir was born.

Complicates, in six places, each established in its own module: that a founding narrative conceals the floor (Module 1 — sometimes it sanctifies it); that a settlement's legal fiction grants and withdraws in one instrument (Module 2 — the anteriority claim instead declares the incumbent the innovator, and is unfalsifiable because the catastrophe that justifies the restoration destroyed the evidence); that a regime's claimed antiquity reflects memory (Module 3 — it is selected by the current enemy, and when the claimed ancestors change one should look at the frontier, not the archive); that formation is withheld by intention (Module 4 — by capacity); that a religious endowment removes property from the fisc (Module 6 — it shelters the asset from the king, not the income from the collector); and that a competent judiciary implies protection (Module 9 — protection is a function of where the appeal chain ends, and an order can have excellent justice and no liberty at once).

Refutes nothing in the framework outright. What it does instead is force one revision, which is the study's single accumulated contribution.

The revision

The framework's diagnostic on the seam asks whether the crown pays the local clergy, and treats a yes as evidence of an outsourced robe. That question is right and it is incomplete, because it does not distinguish between the two things a crown can buy.

The revision: an order that subsidises many sanctions and an order that purchases one exclusively have bought different instruments with different prices, and the choice is made once, at the founding, and cannot be unmade.

Rented sanction — subsidy paid to whatever priesthoods are already standing, each speaking only for its own city — is cheap, requires no formation apparatus, generates no official truth and therefore no official falsehood, and transfers intact to the next conqueror. Its cost is that it gives the crown nothing portable: no empire-wide claim, no instrument for making a subject into a member, no answer to a rival that speaks in the same terms everywhere.

Purchased monopoly — one priesthood given exclusive doctrinal authority and jurisdiction, its competitors stripped of standing — buys exactly that portability. It also does four things the buyer does not intend and cannot reverse. It manufactures an official falsehood in every province that holds another confession, which converts ordinary religious difference into a legal problem. It forecloses the crown's ability to acquire a different formation instrument later, because the monopoly holder will destroy the alternative, as Module 4 found happening to Mani within three years of his patron's death. It makes the crown's information about dissenting provinces dependent on the leaders of communities it periodically strikes. And where the purchased priesthood is a closed caste, it settles the confessional future of every province not already held, permanently, on the first day.

The diagnostic that follows is therefore not *does the crown pay the clergy* but **does the crown pay one clergy or many, and can that clergy recruit?** Those two questions, answerable at the founding, predict the order's formation reach, its information regime, its treatment of minorities, the location of its liberties, and the composition of the population that will decline to defend it.

The Achaemenid and Sasanian cases are the controlled pair that establishes this, and the framework should carry it forward as a distinction to be tested on the next case that offers a conqueror the choice.

The strongest case for the defence

Now the counter-position, stated at its full weight by someone who is not making it.

It runs like this.

For four hundred and twenty-seven years the Sasanian order coordinated the most productive agricultural region in western Asia and made it feed a population it could never have fed unaided. It built the Nahrawan; it carried the Diyala to the greatest extent of settlement in that region's recorded history; it maintained a silver coinage of roughly four grams at high purity across mints from Mesopotamia to Tokharistan, which is a public good of the first order for anyone who has to convert a crop into a tax payment and back into seed. It held a frontier against Rome and another against the steppe, and the interior behind those frontiers was, for long stretches, quiet.

It produced a legal system that a Roman officer who despised everything else about the Persians conceded was better staffed than his own — judges appointed for proved experience and uprightness, who laughed at the Roman practice of assigning expert advisers to ignorant magistrates. It produced a jurisprudence that became an independent discipline and a casebook of a thousand judgements that survives.

And it produced, or sheltered, the intellectual traffic that carried classical learning across the seventh century. Gundeshapur, founded to hold deported Antiochenes, became a centre of medicine and translation that Islamic medicine took as its model. The School of Nisibis, refounded by refugees the Roman emperor had expelled, trained the leadership of a church that translated Greek philosophy and science into Syriac, from which the Abbasid translation movement took it into Arabic, from which Europe took it back. The Babylonian academies produced, under Sasanian rule, a text that has organised Jewish life ever since — and could not have produced it under Byzantine rule, because Byzantium would not have permitted it.

That last point is the counter-position's sharpest edge, and it deserves stating in its strongest form. **The very features this study has read as failures produced the pluralism.** A crown that could not convert its subjects did not convert them. A church expelled from the Roman empire found a home in the Persian one and built a seminary with written statutes on Persian soil. A Jewish community that Rome would have crushed compiled its law in peace at Sura and Pumbedita. Against its Christian contemporary, the Sasanian empire was for long stretches the more plural of the two, and the plurality was not incidental — it is where the transmission happened. A successful assimilation, of the kind Module 4 treats as the thing the crown failed to achieve, would have destroyed exactly the intellectual ecology that made the transmission possible.

And the statecraft outlived the state. *Kharāj* and *jizya* are the Sasanian *kharāg* and *gezīdag*; the administrative structure of early Islamic Iraq is substantially Khosrow I's; the mirrors-for-princes tradition that shaped medieval Islamic political thought is built from Sasanian material, with the circle of justice at its centre. The civilisation that conquered this order adopted its government wholesale, which is the most practical compliment one order can pay another.

That is the case, and it is a strong one. Here is the answer.

First: every item of it is true, and every item of it was made by the floor. The canals were dug and maintained by corvée labour that Module 5 found legally attached to the land and liable to unpaid infantry service besides. Gundeshapur was built by the population of Antioch, marched several hundred miles under guard and never permitted to go home; Module 11 held that as a category of the sword precisely because

it produces no bodies and therefore reads, in every ordinary accounting, as an achievement. The silver was good and it was collected from men who could be punished for their brothers' offences. To credit the coordination is right; to credit it without naming the instrument is to accept the order's own accounting.

Second: the pluralism was not a policy and it did not survive contact with the crown's interest. It was, as Module 4 established, the residue of a constitutional incapacity to convert. Where the crown *could* strike, it struck: Mani dead within three years of his patron; Mazdak and his followers put to the sword after a staged disputation; Kirdir's list of communities smitten; the public Sabbath forbidden in 455 and the Jewish schools closed in 467; forty years of persecution under Shapur II; the exilarch executed and the office left vacant. The Church of the East flourished in Persia when it was useful to the crown and was persecuted when it was not, and the difference between the two empires on this question is one of instrument and degree, not of kind. An order does not get credit for tolerance it was structurally unable to withhold, any more than it escapes blame for the intolerance it managed anyway.

Third — and this is the concession the answer has to make — the transmission is real, and it belongs to the carriers. The Greek philosophy that reached Baghdad reached it through Syriac Christians, not through the King of Kings. The medicine of Gundeshapur was the medicine of deported physicians and their descendants. The Talmud was made by rabbis. What the crown supplied was a charter, and Module 9 established exactly why it supplied it: Yazdegerd I was at war with his own nobility and clergy and needed a third constituency. The pluralism that carried classical learning across the seventh century is, on this study's own reading, the residue of a factional fight — and residue is real. Module 9's finding is that a concession accretes into durable liberty when it builds an institution that can outlive the fight it came from, and this one did, spectacularly, for longer than the empire that made it. So the credit is genuine and the credit is oblique: the order deserves it for something it did not intend and could not have described.

Fourth: the syllogism has to be refused. The strongest form of the defence is not any of the items above but the inference they invite — that coordination on this scale requires an order like this one, that the alluvium needed a state, and that therefore the estate doctrine, the poll-tax exemption list, the closed priesthood and four centuries of formation withheld from the people who dug the canals were the price of the harvest. The first half of that is true. The second does not follow, and the framework exists to say so. The alluvium needed water management. It did not need a doctrine that placed the men who dug the ditches in the fourth estate and told them the arrangement was the shape of the sky. Those are separable, and the case itself proves they are separable,

because the same canals were maintained by a caliphate with a completely different social theory and were carried higher under the Abbasids than the Sasanians ever took them.

And the last thing, which is not a rebuttal but a limit on both sides. This study does not claim the counterfactual. It does not know what would have stood on the alluvium between 224 and 651 in the Sasanians' absence, and neither does anyone else. What it claims is narrower and harder to escape: that the achievement and the cost came out of the same machine, that an accounting which takes the canals and not the corvée is not an accounting, and that the man most closely identified with the order's greatness is the one Procopius watched kill his brother, his brothers, his brother's brothers, all their male children and his own uncle — and who is remembered as the Just.

What the study ends on

It ends where it began, at a fire.

The Landscape found that the family which took this empire held a hereditary religious office before it held a throne: Sasan, on Ṭabarī's account, warden of the temple of Anahid at Istakhr. Module 1 found Ardashir sending the heads of the provincial kings who would not submit to that same temple. Module 2 found him extinguishing every other dynasty's fire and buying one priesthood outright, which is the decision this module has argued determined everything downstream. And Module 10 found the last King of Kings, an eight-year-old who had spent the civil war hiding in that building, crowned there in June 632 — chosen, the sources say, as a symbol of rejuvenation.

Four hundred and eight years. One fire. The first office the house ever held and the last thing it ever did.

The framework's proposition is that a durable order is an armed settlement with a managed belief laid over it, that the belief makes the force cheap, and that the whole thing becomes, in time, simply the way the world is. This case supplies the sharpest available demonstration and one correction. The demonstration is the fire itself: an asset the founding family already owned, converted at the founding into an exclusive monopoly, and still standing as the dynasty's last address four centuries later.

The correction is that the belief never did make the force cheap — not in the province that paid for everything. Module 4 found why: the apparatus that could have made it cheap was constitutionally unable to take those people in. So the order ran, for four hundred years, on surveillance and intermediaries in the place where it most

needed conviction, and Module 10 found the bill: not a rising, but an absence, at the moment an army arrived that did not have that problem.

Surveillance is the tell of a belief that never took. This order left that tell in its richest province for the whole of its life, and the tell was accurate.

A note on sources. This module advances no new evidence. Every factual claim in it has been established, sourced and qualified in one of the preceding modules, and the reader who wants the provenance of any statement here should go to the module named beside it. The public-domain primary quotations this study rests on are Tacitus in Church and Brodribb, Ammianus in Yonge, Cassius Dio and Procopius in Dewing, Joshua the Stylite in Wright, the *Kārnāmag* in Sanjana, the Letter of Tansar and the Dēnkard passages in Darmesteter's French, the *Šāyest lā-Šāyest* and *Sad Dar* in West, the Synod of 410 in Chabot's French, and the coin legend of the kings of Persis as given in Encyclopaedia Iranica.

The constraint that governed the whole study, restated at the end. No Sasanian royal or priestly inscription has been quoted anywhere in these twelve modules, because every edition and translation of them is modern and in copyright. Shapur's great inscription at the Kaʿba-ye Zardošt, Kirdir's four inscriptions, Narseh's at Paikuli, and the trilingual labels on the investiture reliefs have all been paraphrased. Nor has the Sasanian law book been quoted, for the reasons set out in Module 2: Bulsara's 1937 English is judged by Perikhanian to fall short of scholarly standards and its copyright position is unresolved, while the reliable editions of Perikhanian and Macuch are modern. The Babylonian Talmud has been paraphrased throughout rather than quoted, because Rodkinson's public-domain English is abridged and non-standard and the relevant passages could not be verified within it — a limitation that cost this study a quotation in four separate modules and that a future version with access to the Soncino or Steinsaltz texts should repair. **A reader assessing this study should know that its three most important bodies of evidence — the royal inscriptions, the law book and the Talmud — are the three it could not quote.**

One correction was made in the course of the work and is recorded here as well as at the point of correction. Module 4's source note stated that Rodkinson's Baba Bathra omits the enactment attributed to Joshua ben Gamla concerning teachers of children. That claim rested on automated retrievals that were being blocked before reaching the text, and it was withdrawn on the face of Module 5. What can accurately be said is that Rodkinson's own synopsis lists the enactment and that this study could not locate its wording in the pages it examined.

The study's principal debts to modern scholarship, named here in one place: Encyclopaedia Iranica throughout, and without it this study could not have been

written; Parvaneh Pourshariati, whose reading of the Sasanian order as a Sasanian–Parthian confederacy underlies the framing of Modules 8 and 10 and whose thesis is contested and has been used through its concrete evidence rather than adopted wholesale; Maria Macuch and Anahit Perikhanian on Sasanian law, whose work this study relies on and cannot quote; Ehsan Yarshater, A. Sh. Shahbazi, Touraj Daryaee, Rahim Shayegan, Josef Wiesehöfer, Giuseppe Gnoli and Matthew Canepa on the question of Achaemenid memory, whose disagreement Module 3 reports rather than resolves; Mary Boyce on Zoroastrianism and on the *Kārnāmag*; Jacob Neusner, Richard Kalmin, Jason Sion Mokhtarian and Simcha Gross on the Jews of Sasanian Babylonia; Robert McC. Adams for the Diyala; Patricia Crone and Touraj Daryaee for the opposed readings of Mazdak; and Khodadad Rezakhani for the judgement that closes Module 10.

And the study's own weak links, gathered. Three arguments carry disproportionate weight and each could fail. The reading of the appeal chain in Module 9 — that the chief priest could overrule any judgement but the king's — rests on a single reference-work rendering of passages this study cannot read directly. The metabolic argument of Modules 10 and 11 depends on a small number of studies of the 628 river shift and on settlement area as a proxy for population. And the framing of the collapse depends on Pourshariati, whose thesis a competent scholar may reject. Beyond those, the negative claim of Module 3 — that no Sasanian source of the founding centuries asserts Achaemenid descent — is an argument from absence across a badly preserved corpus that one securely read inscription would overturn.